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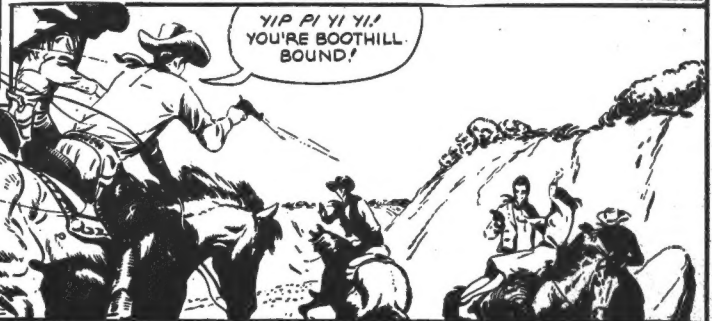


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JACK LONDON CLASSIC

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"Health to the man on trail this night," toasted the Malemute Kid. "May his grub hold out; may his dogs keep their legs; may his matches never miss fire. God prosper him, and . . . confusion to the Mounted Police."

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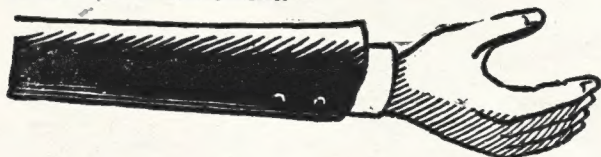
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TO THE MAN ON TRAIL

By JACK LONDON

"Health to the man on trail—this night," toasted the Malemute Kid. "May his grub hold out; may his dogs keep their legs; may his matches never miss fire. God prosper him and—confusion to the Mounted Police, this night 'specially."

"DUMP IT IN."

"But I say, Kid, isn't that going it a little too strong? Whisky and alcohol's bad enough; but when it comes to brandy and pepper sauce and—"

"Dump it in. Who's making this punch, anyway?" And Malemute Kid smiled benignantly through the clouds of steam. "By the time you've been in this country as long as I have, my son, and lived on rabbit tracks and salmon belly, you'll learn that Christmas comes only once per annum. And a Christmas without punch is sinking a hole to bedrock with nary a pay streak."

"Stack up on that fer a high cyard," approved Big Jim Belden, who had come down from his claim on Mazy May to spend Christmas, and who, as everyone knew, had been living the two months past on straight moose meat. "Hain't fergot the hooch we-uns made on the Tanana, hev yeh?"

"Well, I guess yes. Boys, it would have done your hearts good to see that whole tribe fighting drunk—and all because of a glorious ferment of sugar and sour dough. That was before your time," Malemute Kid said as he turned to Stanley Prince, a young mining expert who had been in two years. "No white women in the country then, and Mason wanted to get married. Ruth's father was chief of the Tananas, and objected, like the rest of the tribe. Stiff? why, I used my last pound of sugar; finest work in that line I ever did in my life. You should have seen the chase, down the river and across the portage."

"But the squaw?" asked Louis Savoy, the tall French Canadian, becoming interested; for he had heard of this wild deed when at Forty Mile the preceding winter.

Then Malemute Kid, who was a born

raconteur, told the unvarnished tale of the Northland Lochinvar. More than one rough adventurer of the North felt his heartstrings draw closer and experienced vague yearnings for the sunnier pastures of the Southland, where life promised something more than a barren struggle with cold and death.

"We struck the Yukon just behind the first ice run," he concluded, "and the tribe only a quarter of an hour behind. But that saved us; for the second run broke the jam above and shut them out. When they finally got into Nuklukyeto, the whole post was ready for them. And as to the forgathering, ask Father Roubeau here: he performed the ceremony."

The Jesuit took the pipe from his lips but could only express his gratification with patriarchal smiles, while Protestant and Catholic vigorously applauded.

"By gar!" ejaculated Louis Savoy, who seemed overcome by the romance of it. "*La petite squaw; mon Mason brav.* By gar!"

Then, as the first tin cups of punch went round, Bettles the Unquenchable sprang to his feet and struck up his favorite drinking song:

*"There's Henry Ward Beecher
And Sunday-school teachers,
All drink of the sassafras root;
But you bet all the same,
If it had its right name,
It's the juice of the forbidden fruit."*

"Oh, the juice of the forbidden fruit," roared out the bacchanalian chorus,

*"Oh, the juice of the forbidden fruit;
But you bet all the same,
If it had its right name,
It's the juice of the forbidden fruit."*



Malemute Kid's frightful concoction did its work; the men of the camps and trails unbent in its genial glow, and jest and song and tales of past adventure went round the board. Aliens from a dozen lands, they toasted each and all. It was the Englishman, Prince, who pledged "Uncle Sam, the precocious infant of the New World"; the Yankee, Bettles, who drank to "The Queen, God bless her"; and together, Savoy and Meyers, the German trader, clanged their cups to Alsace and Lorraine.

Then Malemute Kid arose, cup in hand, and glanced at the greased paper window, where the frost stood full three inches thick.

"A health to the man on trail this night; may his grub hold out; may his dogs keep their legs; may his matches never miss fire."

Crack! Crack! They heard the familiar music of the dog whip, the whining howl of the Malemutes, and the crunch of a sled as it drew up to the cabin. Conversation languished while they waited the issue.

"An old-timer; cares for his dogs and then himself," whispered Malemute Kid to Prince as they listened to the snapping jaws and the wolfish snarls and yelps of pain which proclaimed to their practiced ears that the stranger was beating back their dogs while he fed his own.

Then came the expected knock, sharp and confident, and the stranger entered. Dazzled by the light, he hesitated a moment at the door, giving to all a chance for scrutiny. He was a striking personage, and a most picturesque one, in his Arctic dress of wool and fur. Standing six foot two or three, with proportionate breadth of shoulders and depth of chest, his smooth-shaven face nipped by the cold to a gleaming pink, his long lashes and eyebrows white with ice, and the ear and neck flaps of his great wolfskin cap loosely raised, he seemed, of a verity, the Frost King, just stepped in out of the night. Clapsed outside his Mackinaw jacket, a beaded belt held two large Colt's revolvers and a hunting knife, while he carried, in addition to the inevitable dog whip, a smokeless rifle of the largest bore and latest pattern. As he came forward, for all his step was firm and elastic, they

could see that fatigue bore heavily upon him.

An awkward silence had fallen, but his hearty "What cheer, my lads?" put them quickly at ease, and the next instant Malemute Kid and he had gripped hands. Though they had never met, each had heard of the other, and the recognition was mutual. A sweeping introduction and a mug of punch were forced upon him before he could explain his errand.

"How long since that basket sled, with three men and eight dogs, passed?" he asked.

"An even two days ahead. Are you after them?"

"Yes; my team. Run them off under my very nose, the cusses. I've gained two days on them already—pick them up on the next run."

"Reckon they'll show spunk?" asked Belden, in order to keep up the conversation, for Malemute Kid already had the coffeepot on and was busily frying bacon and moose meat.

The stranger significantly tapped his revolvers.

"When'd yeh leave Dawson?"

"Twelve o'clock."

"Last night?"—as a matter of course.

"Today."

A murmur of surprise passed round the circle. And well it might; for it was just midnight, and seventy-five miles of rough river trail was not to be sneered at for a twelve hours' run.

The talk soon became impersonal, however, harking back to the trails of childhood.

As the young stranger ate of the rude fare Malemute Kid attentively studied his face. Nor was he long in deciding that it was fair, honest, and open, and that he like it. Still youthful, the lines had been firmly traced by toil and hardship. Though genial in conversation, and mild when at rest, the blue eyes gave promise of the hard steel-glitter which comes when called into action, especially against odds. The heavy jaw and square-cut chin demonstrated rugged pertinacity and indomitability. Nor, though the attributes of the lion were there, was there wanting the certain softness, the hint of womanliness, which bespoke the emotional nature.

"So thet's how me an' the ol' woman

got spliced," said Belden, concluding the exciting tale of his courtship. "'Here we be, Dad,' sez she. 'An' may yeh be damned,' sez he to her, an' then to me, 'Jim, yeh—yeh git outen them good duds o' yourn; I want a right peart slice o' thet forty acre plowed 'fore dinner.' An' then he turns on her an' sez, 'An' yeh, Sal; yeh sail inter them dishes.' An' then he sort o' sniffled an' kissed her. An' I was thet happy—but he seen me an' roars out, 'Yeh, Jim!' An' yeh bet I dusted fer the barn."

"Any kids waiting for you back in the States?" asked the stranger.

"Nope; Sal died 'fore any come. Thet's why I'm here." Belden abstractedly began to light his pipe, which had failed to go out, and then brightened up with, "How 'bout yerself, stranger—married man?"

For reply, he opened his watch, slipped it from the thong which served for a chain, and passed it over. Belden pricked up the slush lamp, surveyed the inside of the case critically, and, swearing admiringly to himself, handed it over to Louis Savoy. With numerous "By gars!" he finally surrendered it to Prince, and they noticed that his hands trembled and his eyes took on a peculiar softness. And so it passed from horny hand to horny hand—the pasted photograph of a woman, the clinging kind that such men fancy, with a babe at the breast. Those who had not yet seen the wonder were keen with curiosity; those who had become silent and retrospective. They could face the pinch of famine, the grip of scurvy, or the quick death by field or flood; but the pictured semblance of a stranger woman and child made women and children of them all.

"Never have seen the youngster yet—he's a boy, she says, and two years old," said the stranger as he received the treasure back. A lingering moment he gazed upon it, then snapped the case and turned away, but not quick enough to hide the restrained rush of tears.

Malemute Kid led him to a bunk and bade him turn in.

"Call me at four sharp. Don't fail me," were his last words, and a moment later he was breathing in the heaviness of exhausted sleep.

"By Jove! He's a plucky chap," commented Prince. "Three hours' sleep after

seventy-five miles with the dogs, and then the trail again. Who is he, Kid?"

"Jack Westondale. Been in going on three years, with nothing but the name of working like a horse, and any amount of bad luck to his credit. I never knew him, but Sitka Charley told me about him."

"It seems hard that a man with a sweet young wife like his should be putting in his years in this Godforsaken hole, where every year counts two on the outside."

"The trouble with him is clean grit and stubbornness. He's cleaned up twice with a stake, but lost it both times."

Here the conversation was broken off by an uproar from Bettles, for the effect had begun to wear away. And soon the bleak years of monotonous grub and deadening toil were being forgotten in rough merriment. Malemute Kid alone seemed unable to lose himself, and cast many an anxious look at his watch. Once he put on his mittens and beaver-skin cap, and, leaving the cabin, fell to rummaging about in the cache.

Nor could he wait the hour designated; for he was fifteen minutes ahead of time in rousing his guest. The young giant had stiffened badly, and brisk rubbing was necessary to bring him to his feet. He tottered painfully out of the cabin, to find his dogs harnessed and everything ready for the start. The company wished him good luck and a short chase, while Father Roubeau, hurriedly blessing him, led the stampede for the cabin; and small wonder, for it is not good to face seventy-four degrees below zero with naked ears and hands.

Malemute Kid saw him to the main trail, and there, gripping his hand heartily, gave him advice.

"You'll find a hundred pounds of salmon eggs on the sled," he said. "The dogs will go as far on that as with one hundred and fifty of fish, and you can't get dog food at Pelly, as you probably expected." The stranger started, and his eyes flashed, but he did not interrupt. "You can't get an ounce of food for dog or man till you reach Five Fingers, and that's a stiff two hundred miles. Watch out for open water on the Thirty Mile River, and be sure you take the big cutoff above Le Barge."

HOT ICE

The snowfall in winter in Virginia is heavier than on the north coast of Alaska; and on the north coast of Canada it is less than in Chicago. And most of what little snow falls in the Far North is soon swept away by the wind into gullies on land and behind pressure ridges on the sea ice. According to Vilhjalmur Stefansson, who spent ten winters in the exploration of the western Arctic, from 75 to 90 percent of the surface of Arctic land is comparatively free from snow at all seasons.

"How did you know it? Surely the news can't be ahead of me already?"

"I don't know it; and what's more, I don't want to know it. But you never owned that team you're chasing. Sitka Charley sold it to them last spring. But he sized you up to me as square once, and I believe him. I've seen your face; I like it. And I've seen—why, damn you, hit the high places for salt water and that wife of yours, and—" Here the Kid unmittened and jerked out his sack.

"No; I don't need it," and the tears froze on his cheeks as he convulsively gripped Malemute Kid's hand.

"Then don't spare the dogs; cut them out of the traces as fast as they drop; buy them, and think they're cheap at ten dollars a pound. You can get them at Five Fingers, Little Salmon, and Hootalinqua. And watch out for wet feet," was his parting advice. "Keep a-traveling up to twenty-five, but if it gets below that, build a fire and change your socks."

Fifteen minutes had barely elapsed when the jingle of bells announced new arrivals. The door opened, and a mounted policeman of the Northwest Territory entered, followed by two half-breed dog drivers. Like Westondale, they were heavily armed and showed signs of fatigue. The half-breeds had been born to the trail and bore it easily; but the young policeman was badly exhausted. Still, the dogged obstinacy of his race held him to the pace he had set, and would hold him till he dropped in his tracks.

"When did Westondale pull out?" he asked. "He stopped here, didn't he?" This was supererogatory, for the tracks told their own tale too well.

Malemute Kid had caught Belden's eye,

and he, scenting the wind, replied evasively, "A right peart while back."

"Come, my man; speak up," the policeman admonished.

"Yeh seem to want him right smart. Hez he ben gittin' cantankerous down Dawson way?"

"Held up Harry McFarland's for forty thousand; exchanged it at the P. C. store for a check on Seattle; and who's to stop the cashing of it if we don't overtake him? When did he pull out?"

Every eye suppressed its excitement, for Malemute Kid had given the cue, and the young officer encountered wooden faces on every hand.

Striding over to Prince, he put the question to him. Though it hurt him, gazing into the frank, earnest face of his fellow countryman, he replied inconsequentially on the state of the trail.

Then he espied Father Robeau, who could not lie. "A quarter of an hour ago," the priest answered; "but he had four hours' rest for himself and dogs."

"Fifteen minutes' start, and he's fresh! My God!" The poor fellow staggered back, half fainting from exhaustion and disappointment, murmuring something about the run from Dawson in ten hours and the dogs being played out.

Malemute Kid forced a mug of punch upon him; then he turned for the door, ordering the dog drivers to follow. But the warmth and promise of rest were too tempting, and they objected strenuously. The Kid was conversant with their French patios, and followed it anxiously.

They swore that the dogs were gone up; that Siwash and Babette would have to be shot before the first mile was covered; that the rest were almost as bad; and that it would be better for all hands to rest up.

"Lend me five dogs?" he asked, turning to Malemute Kid.

But the Kid shook his head.

"I'll sign a check on Captain Constantine for five thousand—here's my papers—I'm authorized to draw at my own discretion."

Again the silent refusal.

"Then I'll requisition them in the name of the Queen."

Smiling incredulously, the Kid glanced at his well-stocked arsenal and the En-

glishman, realizing his impotency, turned for the door. But the dog drivers still objecting, he whirled upon them fiercely, calling them women and curs. The swart face of the older half-breed flushed angrily as he drew himself up and promised in good, round terms that he would travel his leader off his legs, and would then be delighted to plant him in the snow.

The young officer—and it required his whole will—walked steadily to the door, exhibiting a freshness he did not possess. But they all knew and appreciated his proud effort; nor could he veil the twinges of agony that shot across his face. Covered with frost, the dogs were curled up in the snow, and it was almost impossible to get them to their feet. The poor brutes whined under the stinging lash, for the dog drivers were angry and cruel; nor till Babette, the leader, was cut from the traces, could they break out the sled and get under way.

"A dirty scoundrel and a liar!" "By gar! Him no good!" "A thief!" "Worse than an Indian!" It was evident that they were angry—first at the way they had been deceived; and second at the outraged ethics of the Northland, where honesty, above all, was man's prime jewel. "An' we gave the cuss a hand, after knowin' what he'd did." All eyes turned accusingly upon Malemute Kid, who rose from the corner where he had been making Babette comfortable, and silently emptied the bowl for a final round of punch.

"It's a cold night, boys—a bitter cold night," was the irrelevant commencement of his defense. "You've all traveled trail, and know what that stands for. Don't jump a dog when he's down. You've only heard one side. A whiter man than Jack Westondale never ate from the same pot nor stretched blanket with you or me. Last fall he gave his whole clean-up, forty

FROSTBITE LESSON

One of our superstitions, in temperate and frigid zones alike, is that the proper method of alleviating frostbite is to rub the affected part with snow. Few things could be more absurd. For when a cold body is brought in contact with a warm body, the warm body is cooled. And if one cold body is brought in contact with another still colder, there is a similar lowering of temperature of the former. In the case of a frost-bitten cheek, the flesh is only a little below the freezing point, while the snow (in a temperature of -50° F.) would be some 80 degrees colder than freezing. So don't rub on snow. Take a leaf from the Eskimos' book: Turn your back to the wind, withdraw one hand from your mitten, and apply the warm palm to the affected spot. When that hand cools, use the other. And don't rub the frost-bitten spot; you may break the skin.

thousand, to Joe Castrell, to buy in on Dominion. Today he'd be a millionaire. But while he stayed behind at Circle City, taking care of his partner with the scurvy, what does Castrell do? Goes into McFarland's, jumps the limit, and drops the whole sack. Found him dead in the snow the next day. And poor Jack laying his plans to go out this winter to his wife and the boy he's never seen. You'll notice he took exactly what his partner lost—forty thousand. Well, he's gone out; and what are you going to do about it?"

The Kid glanced round the circle of his judges, noted the softening of their faces, then raised his mug aloft. "So a health to the man on trail this night; may his grub hold out; may his dogs keep their legs; may his matches never miss fire. God prosper him; good luck go with him; and—"

"Confusion to the Mounted Police!" cried Bettles, to the crash of the empty cups. ¹

HYPNOTIST

A Cree Indian has been known to approach an Arctic hare close enough to get in a shot with a bow and arrow, merely by walking around the animal in a circle, and gradually decreasing the diameter of the circle.

The King of Crooked Creek

By C. HALL THOMPSON

A man by day, a killer beast by night . . . so the gibbering natives of Crooked Creek mumbled, as the raw cheechako—Doc Deseret—mushed down the Yukon's danger trail.

DESERET MEANT to get drunk. With a bottle of rotgut and a beer-mug, he sat at the rickety table, hating every shadowed corner of this government waystation that crouched like a dying beast at the heart of the frozen wasteland men called Alaska. The pot-bellied stove gave off too little heat; raw wind chewed at the mud chinking of log-walls. Sleet, whirling against the oilpaper windows, made a whispering sound that exploded crazily in snowbound silence. Deseret took another gulp of whiskey, feeling it burn his throat and chest; he wanted to shut out the stillness and waste; the lonely creak of the kerosene lamp over the bar; the bitter murmur in his head that kept taunting, *You're a fool, Deseret. An idealistic fool . . .* He swore thickly.

At the sound, the bartender looked up. He was a little man called Short John with a wind-red nose and baldspot. He spent nine months out of the year alone in this jumping off place. He liked people and rum and talk. It was hard when one of the men who passed through his waystation went taciturn. Deseret had been a disappointment; he had not spoken a word all night. Even the curse was encouraging.

Short John idled over to Deseret's table. He mopped the scarred wood with a bar rag and eyed the bottle. It had been freshly opened; now, it was half shot. Short John blinked like a friendly dog. He grinned.

"You sure got 'em bad, Doc . . ."

Deseret looked at him. "Got What?"

"The screaming meemies . . ."

The bottle and mug clinked; whiskey gurgled.

"Yeah," Deseret said. "I got them, all right . . ."

Short John squatted in a roughhewn

chair. He looked hopeful.

"A woman, maybe . . .?"

Gray eyes swung on him; they were hard like the rest of the face. Disillusioned lines ran from taut nostrils to the corners of a thin mouth. Deseret looked older than thirty-two. Abruptly, a sour laugh broke his lips.

"A woman? . . . No, John. It's a hell of a lot more complicated than that. It's the problem of a doctor with ideals." He swallowed half the shot at a gulp. "Let me give you an arithmetic exercise, John. One doctor plus one set of ideals equals . . . one failure . . ."

The harsh laugh came again, then died. Somehow the joke had fallen flat. Deseret reached for the bottle.

"I don't know," Short John said. "You done a lot of good since you come to the Yukon territory . . ."

Deseret shook his head slowly.

"I'll tell you a story, my friend. About a pal of mine called Apley. We went to Yale together. Great chums. Yeah. Only one difference between us. Apley was smart. Got himself a soft berth in the upper crust, treating rich witches for ailments they don't have. You know where Apley is, now? On top. Money, respect, a society-born wife. Yeah. Today, he's one of the bright boys who can afford to buy the furs men fight over and die for up here."

He stared dully at the liquor.

"And little Doctor Scott Deseret? What became of him, John? He had noble ambitions, he did. Help humanity where it most needs help. Join the government, go into the frozen north. So, here I am. My hands cracked and frostbitten. The joints stiff. Look at those hands, John. Could have been the hands of a great surgeon. And, now . . .?" Lean, vise-like fingers gripped the mug. "Now, nothing. No



He was halfway through the pass when a wild cry tore the silence . . . Avalanche!

big money, no women with white skin and slim bodies, no comfort or respect . . . Only loneliness and rest of my life working for Indians and rundown sourdoughs that can't pay me a red cent."

Deseret's arm lashed out; whiskey spluttered. The glass whirled across the room and shattered against the gut of the stove. Dregs dried on the redhot metal, hissing softly. Short John did not move. Deseret sank back in his chair, staring at nothing. For a long time, neither of them spoke. Finally, Deseret went to the bar and brought back another glass. He filled it; his hand wasn't steady; whiskey spilled. Automatically, Short John mopped it up.

After a minute, he said: "You on a job, now, Doc?"

Deseret swallowed a mouthful and nodded.

"Where you headed?"

"Crooked Creek."

MAYBE Short John's face didn't go sallow and tight, Deseret thought. The liquor was strong; maybe he only imagined that change of expression. He didn't think so. There was no mistaking the new tension in Short John's voice.

"That's Alix Tyne's territory."

Deseret nodded. "Tyne's head of the fur-trading post up there."

Short John leaned forward on the table. "You know anything about Crooked Creek, Doc?"

"Only that the office heard a rumor that the Indians there are coming down with smallpox."

"It ain't no rumor." The little man's voice was hard. "You can believe what you hear about Alix Tyne's post, no matter how rotten it sounds. I seen Tyne once. A short guy with a thin twisted face and a leg that was broke and never set right, so he limps. Only once, I seen him, but I can believe them stories about how he drives his Indians into the ground. He uses a bullwhip on 'em if their pelts are too small or few. Funny part is, they don't fight back. He's got some power over them. No other man could feed them rum and disease and fear and make 'em like it . . . You ever hear of Doc Thornton?"

"Jesse Thornton? Yeah. The Office sent him to Crooked Creek a few years

back."

Short John's head bobbed wisely. "And what become of him?"

"They got word he was killed in a snow-slide."

"Sure." Short John laughed hoarsely. "That's the story Tyne handed out. I got different ideas. I figure a man like Tyne ain't going to cotton to anybody cutting in on his territory. So . . . comes an avalanche, and no more Thornton. Mark my word, Doc. Any cheechako goes to Crooked Creek is like to get a mouthful too big to chew."

The words broke off. Short John's eyes switched to the door across the room. A low scratching sound scraped the panels; the rough crossbar rattled hollowly. Short John shrugged. Probably wind and sleet. He turned back to Deseret. The Doctor wasn't looking at him; he stared at his rum thoughtfully. Short John got out a clay pipe and filled it. The match made a grating sound.

"Still," the little man said between puffs, "them Indians is bad off; they need a doctor's care."

"Indians!" Deseret snapped. "What do I care about Tyne and his Indians? Why should I risk what Thornton got? I could be back in the States, now. Have everything. That's what I ought to do. Say to hell with the whole mess. Go back to Skagway, resign and ship out for home. To hell with this lonely penny-ante nobleness."

He started to toss off the rest of his drink. He didn't.

The sound at the door was louder, this time; a sharp scratching and something that might have been a whimper. The two men sat still. Softly, the wick of the kerosene lamp sputtered. The sound came again. Short John frowned and laid down the bar rag.

"Maybe one of the dogs got loose . . ."

Neither of them really heard the words. The whimper rose suddenly to a shrill whine. Short John had reached the door. The crossbar groaned back. A gritty puff of wind and snow spewed into the cabin. Involuntarily, Short John stepped back and said, "Land Sakes!" Deseret did not move. His liquor bright eyes narrowed, unbelieving.

The thing didn't look like a man. Briefly,

heavily, it leaned against the door jamb, then lurched into the room. A foul sick smell came with it. The arms hung limp; the blue-black skin of the hands was caked with frozen blood. For a long minute, it stood, staring stupidly at the stove's red glow. Then, the half-naked legs buckled. It fell woodenly, face down, and lay without moving.

Short John slammed the door, sagging back against it. He blinked at Deseret. After a time, Deseret set down his glass, his hand was steady, calm. He came and knelt beside the man on the floor. His fingers drew apart the tatters of the hide shirt. From shoulders to buttocks, clotting gashes scored the wasted back. Deseret's mouth went tight. Slowly, he rolled the body over. Short John made a sick sound in his throat. He had reason to.

The stiff parka had slipped back. The Indian's face showed black and warped in yellow lamplight. Dark pustules had swollen every feature. The mouth was a ragged hole that let out stinking breath. Scabs had already formed, half-closing the puffed eyesockets. Deep in the narrow slits, a pin point of life still glinted.

Deseret looked at Short John. His voice was as calm and hard as the hand had been. Quietly, he said:

"Smallpox."

Short John's face was dark. "Them's whipmarks on his back," he said. "Bull-whip marks."

Deseret got no chance to answer. The swollen head rolled; the Indian moaned. Deseret bent closer. He spoke in dialect.

"Friend . . . You hear me, Friend? . . . Where do you come from?"

The head lolled; the fat tongue worked; no words come.

He's a Pelly," Short John said. "Don't you see the porcupine quill work on the Moccasins? A Pelly from the crooked Creek."

At the name, the Indian's face tensed. Sounds boiled in his throat. Words came on hissing breath. It was the tongue of the Pellys.

" . . . should not have disobeyed. The King angered. I should not have flouted the word of Shaan . . ."

"Shaan?" Deseret looked up; Short John nodded.

"A Pelly princess. Daughter of the

chief who died. There are stories. 'Pears like she's in with Tyne. Selling her people out to save her own neck."

Deseret swore softly.

" . . . disobeyed," the Indian croaked. "I went unto the Hill of Taboo, and the Black Death struck me . . . The plague destroyed me, as the King warned . . ." The hole of a mouth twisted with fear. "None must go to the Hill. It is spoken by him . . . and by Shaan . . . The Pellys must listen . . . obey . . . or die . . . the plague . . . plague . . ."

Now, it was only the mockery of a human voice. The last breath came slow and unwilling, and dark blood came with it, hanging in swelling droplets at the mouth-corners. The head sagged back; the blood spilled over and ran down into the ear. The Indian did not breathe again.

Finally, Deseret stood erect. All he said was,

"He might've been saved with medical care . . ."

Short John's face had gone sallow. He went and poured two stiff ones and shoved one toward Deseret. Deseret did not touch it. His eyes stayed on the Indian. Neither man spoke. They buried the Pelly, wrapped in a tarp, in a pit burnt in the packed snow. Afterward, Short John used kerosene to disinfect the floor where the body had lain. The lamp swayed gently in a draft from the crumbled chinking. Night wind rose and fell. Logs, stiffened, cracking with the freeze. The silence held. Deseret smoked; his eyes were flat and thoughtful. He didn't drink anymore. In the end, he got into his thawed parka and mukluks, and cinched a thigh-thonged Colt in place. Short John didn't interfere. He waited.

Deseret looked at him. "How far from here to Crooked Creek?"

"Eighteen — maybe twenty mile."

"I'll need fresh dogs," Deseret said.

Short John nodded. That was all.

AT DAWN, the snow let up. Shril wind still lifted biting clouds from the crests of the tundras. The going was slow. Sled runners wedged in fresh drifts. Deseret hove against the gee-pole and snapped at the dogs. He hit out north, along Yukon rimrock. Alongside, the River swelled under strangling ice. The wastes were

swept clean and brilliant in short winter daylight. The dogs yelped; harness and line strained taut. Night came too soon; Deseret kept going.

His hands were numb; he couldn't feel his lips or nose. Finally, at the edge of a spruce grove, he struck camp. He didn't eat much; the beanmash stuck in his craw; the coffee was bitter. He tried to forget the rotten mask of the Indian's face. He couldn't. The dogs dug nests and bedded down. So did Deseret. Sleep played games with him. Beyond the dying fire, night crept too close. Somewhere on the tundras, a wolf worried the moon. Deseret kept the Colt under his hand in the sleeping bag. He couldn't get shut of the notion that every move he made was watched.

The uneasiness stayed. It was cold inside him at high noon, next day, when he sighted the crotch of the Yukon that branched into Crooked Creek. Once, he halted the team and swung his gaze across the land that lay behind. The shimmering glare of river ice, the bluewhite tide of snow scarred by his own tracks. Nothing more. Ahead, rimrock swept into a sharp turn between two sheer bluffs. The walls were steep, pressing in on the narrow pass that led to Crooked Creek.

A jackrabbit nosed out of its small cave to sun itself on a flat rock. A gnarled cropping of weed in the jagged wall quivered with the wind. Deseret told himself he was crazy; there was no cause to fret. But the dead stillness bothered him. He said, "Damn nerves," under his breath, and threw a harsh, "Haw!" at the dogs. The sled groaned forward into the cold shadow of the pass. He was halfway through when a wild cry tore the silence.

"Avalanche!"

The rumble of dislodging ice-boulders drowned the scream. A rain of sleet splattered the canyon floor. Deseret looked up once, and then something dark lunged from a crevice in the wall. A bony shoulder slammed into Deseret's chest. He spun back into the wall's lea, and fell face down, tangled with the other figure. He did not see the crash of the snowslide. He felt the ground shudder. Crackling thunder deafened him. One of the huskies let loose a terrified yelp that rose to a scream and was crushed. The sled swiveled and turned

on its side.

Then, very slowly, the quiet settled in again. The air cleared. The dog that had cried lay dead under a slab of glittering ice. Deseret stumbled to his feet and leaned against the wall, breathing hard. The other man was already standing. For a time, neither of them spoke. Deseret's hand hung just over the Colt-butt. Maybe the avalanche had been an accident. Maybe. But the attempt to rescue him had been planned.

Hoarsely, he said: "I ought to thank you . . ."

The other man did not move. A quiet smile touched one corner of the thin lips. The gaze held Deseret's. They were Indian eyes, in a rugged, wasting Indian face. They were the eyes of an old one who had seen peace and plenty and then the swollen death of children when the salmon-run was low and the caribou deserted Indian hunting grounds, frightened off by the guns of white men. They had grown gentle with seeing, and deep with quiet understanding. The words came in the dialect of the Pellys.

"They do not want you here, my friend. The brutal one whom my people call King will try to send you away. And the Pellys will be afraid to listen to you, as they dared not hear the man Thornton. For this King rules them by fear. Through the girl, Shaan, he commands and my people listen, though it destroys them. For it is the way of the Pelly to obey his Princess . . ." The smile had left the seamed face; deepest eyes were hard. "But, now, they must alter that way. They must escape fear as the blue fox eludes the barking iron of the white hunter; escape death and the downfall of the tribe. And, in this, you can help them . . . I am Koshkalla, weary and wise in years. In your face, now, I see this thing. You will set aside this avalanche, and all the other threats of Alix Tyne. You will not let them frighten you away."

It was sure and calm, like a prophecy. Hearing the gentle, strong voice, you could believe the word of Koshkalla. The smile had returned. The Indian didn't say anymore. He turned and moved off through the chill shade of the pass. After a time, Deseret heard the snapping of dogs, the slow whine of sled runners. The sound

died. Deseret did not move.

The malemutes whimpered. Deseret stared at the dead animal. Dark blood from the crushed entrails oozed from under the boulder. He told himself he was a fool. Only a fool would listen to an old man's high-sounding talk. Why should he end up buried in some lonely drift, waiting for the teeth of hungry wolves? All he had to do was hit back along the trail to Dawson. All he had to do was forget. Only, now, it was no longer just one Indian puffed in death on the floor of a waystation.

It was the small blackened corpses of kids who never had a prayer; the silent crying of women with whipscored backs and diseased bodies. It was a way of life rotting in the Arctic sun. Mechanically, Deseret cut the dead dog free of the traces and mended them. He righted the sled. The command was dry in his throat. Dogs and sled moved slowly ahead, toward Alix Tyne's trading post.

II

THE CROOKED CREEK setup wasn't much to look at. The Indian lodges were neglected; thin smoke rose from scanty fires. Women and children watched Deseret's sled pass; there was no friendliness in their faces. There was nothing but suspicion and fear. A muttered word went from lodge to lodge. Narrow-chested braves came from under tent-flies; their faces were muddy and bony with sunken eyes too bright with rotgut. Deseret did not look at them. Sweat made his hands sticky on the lines. He stared straight on, at the low sprawling cabin at the center of the post clearing.

He could hear the wheeze of mukluks behind him; then, slowly, the Pellys closed, noose-like, around the sled. Deseret stopped the dogs. The circle narrowed. An Indian whelp sniffed noses with Deseret's lead-dog. One of the bucks growled an order. The whelp retreated. Behind pale hostility, their eyes held something like surprise. As though they were seeing a ghost.

Deseret straightened consciously. His hand rested easy on the butt of the .45. His voice was toneless.

"Take me to Tyne."

KEEP MOVIN'

Many of us think that Eskimos, as a class, can stand more cold than white men. As a matter of fact, the readiness with which a man's face freezes is an individual, rather than a racial, characteristic. It depends, partly at least, on the circulation of the blood.

SNOW-BLIND!

In general, Eskimos seem to be far more susceptible to snow-blindness than white men. The reason is that a man who has never suffered from it is partially immune; but once afflicted, you have less resistance the next time.

Despite the Hollywood versions, the most trying day is not one of bright sunshine and light clouds; it is when the weather is hazy, and light is so uniformly diffused that no shadows are cast. This causes eye-strain. Meanwhile the ultra-violet rays of the sun are penetrating the haze, and are being reflected by the snow into the eyes of the traveler—unless they are filtered out by amber goggles.

The first sign of snow-blindness is the feeling that there are small grains of sand in the eyes. During the night (assuming that you have been traveling all day), shooting pains (resembling those of ear-ache or toothache, only worse), begin. Tears flow freely. But there is no real blindness; only aversion to light.

Momentarily, the noose went lax. An uneasy mutter rarf among the Indians. Then, alone, a tall buck moved toward Deseret. His muscles were stringy; pant-legs flapped in the dusk wind. The knife in his fist gleamed faintly. Moccasined feet tensed for the spring.

"Hold on!"

The voice was nasal and cutting, like a barbed whip. It stopped the Pelly dead. That mutter got loud. A gap opened in the circle. Deseret saw Alix Tyne.

Short John had been right. Tyne was small. It wasn't just physical. The smallness was deep behind slitted bloodshot eyes and colorless lips. The face was thin-boned, fragile, and topped by a mane of long, straw-colored hair. The shoulders were narrow; the legs weren't straight. The right ankle was brittle-looking and warped inward. Inner smallness seemed to have shrunk every part of his body. Deliberately, he came forward; the limp was

under control, like the humorless smile on his lips. He stood in front of the buck with the knife; his fingers fondled the leaded butt of a blacksnake. The movement came like the strike of a rattler. The whipbutt caught the Indian across the jaw. He sagged with a low groan. No one moved to pick him up. Alix Tyne turned to Deseret. The smile was still in place.

"You will overlook the poor reception, I hope. These animals do not know a gentleman when they meet one. Welcome to Crooked Creek, Doctor."

Tyne's eyes were brilliant; whiskey was heavy on his breath. His blond beard needed shaving. He extended a sinewy hand. Deseret ignored it. The watching Pellys murmured. Tyne's smile slipped a fraction. He forced a laugh.

"The weather is raw. You will come into the cabin. I have rum straight from Skagway."

Deseret only nodded. Tyne led the way.

"It's not often I get to see a civilized man, Doctor. One gets sick of stupid pigs." With one moccasin, he pushed the Indian's limp form out of his path, and climbed two steps to the rundown porch. "Still, it isn't bad. A man has a lot, here. The best grub, servants that obey. Yes. Here, I'm master of my own world."

The words broke off. They had come into a hot, dim room. The lampwick sputtered. There was food on the roughhewn table and a smell of dried pelts and mulled rum. Deseret did not notice. His gaze fastened on the girl.

She was small, but the smallness had nothing in common with Tyne's. It was clean and flushed, like the opening bud of a dogwood blossom. Her skin was pale bronze; lamplight played on her throat and arms. The dark red lips quivered, full and slightly parted. Her eyes clung to Tyne. Once before Deseret had seen their like — the warm liquid eyes of a fawn raised on a hunter about to fire. Tyne's brittle laugh cut the stillness.

"Yes, my friend, they call me King — and this is my queen." His arm circled the dusky shoulders; thin fingers dug into her flesh. The girl let him kiss her. Deseret's throat felt hot and tight. He looked away. The laugh came again. "Sweet little Shaan who dotes on my every word . . . Isn't she a beauty, Doctor? A savage

beauty. And so loyal to me." The tone had gone sardonic. "Aren't you going to greet our friend, Shaan?"

The voice was throaty with an undertow of strained obedience.

"You are welcome to the land of my people . . ."

"Good girl." Tyne no longer smiled. Then, sharply: "Maya!"

The beaded curtain of a far doorway rustled. A stumpy, pockmarked woman shuffled in. Tyne spoke to her, but the words were for Shaan.

"Your mistress is ready to retire."

Shaan didn't call him a liar. She wanted to. For an instant, Deseret caught a flash or rebellion in the dark eyes. It died. Once, she looked at him. He remembered that fawn again. The beaded curtain whispered. The women were gone.

Tyne went to the table and poured two shots. Deseret took one. He didn't drink. He stood holding the glass, his eyes steady on Tyne. The king of Crooked Creek downed his drink. That sour smile was back.

"Welcome, she says . . . That's how much she knows!"

"Meaning?" Deseret said.

Tyne set down the jigger.

"Shaan's a child. Physically, a woman." Thin lips twisted suggestively. "Mentally, an innocent child . . . She doesn't know these devils as I do . . . When they heard of your coming, it wasn't pretty. You could see the hate and superstition eating at them. They'll be afraid of you, Deseret. Just as they were afraid of Thornton."

"You're discouraging." Deseret concentrated on the amber depths of his drink. "So was the attempt to kill me."

If nothing else, Tyne had a flare for acting. The surprise looked real.

"Already?" he said softly. "Then, you know what I mean. The Pellys are deadly afraid of the white man's medicine."

Deseret looked at him hard.

"I'm not sure it was the Pellys tried to kill me. I'm not sure at all!"

He saw Tyne's mouth stiffen. The bony hand got tight on the whipbutt. Deseret met the blow halfway. His fingers clamped on the fragile wrist. Pain made Tyne's face crooked. The whiphand went livid. The blacksnake slipped from a nerveless grip. Finally, Deseret let go. His voice

was too quiet.

"We're not all broken-down Indians, Tyne."

TYNE went back a step. Under stress, the limp was obvious. He rubbed his wrist. Breath came quick through a false remnant of that sure smile.

"You want to watch what you say to me, Doctor. I told you. This is my world. Here, people do as *I* say. Even Shaan—even the daughter of a great Pelly chief listens to me." The laugh was shrill with bitter pride. "You see, I'm king, here. I have money, power . . . No one accuses the King . . ."

"Not out loud," Deseret said. "But, they think . . ."

The bony figure started forward, then halted. Maybe the throbbing of his wrist stopped him. Or the loud chatter of voices outside the cabin. The noise got nearer. Frantic words came clear above night wind.

" . . . Death! The Black Death!"

Tyne did not move. The beaded curtain muttered. Shaan's face was lovely, even with concern straining its soft lines. She looked at Tyne. He said, "The filthy beasts!" and lunged past Deseret to the door. On the sill, he froze. Over his shoulder, Deseret saw the picture, clear and cold in frozen moonlight.

A wide, cringing half-circle of bucks and squaws hemmed in the porch. The women made small crying sounds that might have been prayers. The eyes of the Pellys did not turn to Tyne. They saw only the wasted form huddled on the steps. The sack of skin and bones shuddered violently. The eyes blazed with fever, already half closed by the sores that had begun to run. It wasn't hard to recognize the late stages of smallpox.

Tyne pressed back against the plank door. Something tinged the rage in his face. It might have been fear. The hand of the diseased Indian reached toward him. "Save, Master . . . save . . ." Tyne's mouth warped with disgust.

"Take him away!" he said shrilly. "I told you never to let a sick one near the cabin!"

The Pellys did not move. Two separate fears worked in their dark faces. Fear of

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Tyne—and the Black Death. The sick one whimpered, crawling nearer the door. Viciously, Tyne let go with the whip. Shaan let out a small hurt sound.

Deseret snapped: "Tyne!"

He seemed not to hear.

"Take him away!" he screamed. "Take the rotting hulk away!"

Reluctantly the bucks obeyed. They caught the crumpled body under the armpits. The circle pressed wider as they dragged the Indian slowly across the compound. Alix Tyne sagged against the doorjamb. His breath shook; so did his hands.

Deseret's voice was taut. "What'll become of him?"

"The sick one?" Tyne shrugged. "They'll give him a little food and firewood, then turn him into the wastes."

"To die . . ." Shaan murmured. She turned away from Tyne's sharp glance.

Tyne said: "The natives want no part of smallpox. It's my order to get rid of the diseased. They follow orders."

"Wait . . ."

The command was quiet, but the Pellys heard it. The bucks stopped dragging the sick one. Their eyes were cold on Deseret as he walked slowly toward them. Deseret kept his tone level.

"That man can be saved. The white man's medicine can cheat the Black Death."

It almost worked. For a second, a flicker of hope touched dark native eyes. Then they swung to Tyne. When they came back, the shadow of fear and suspicion had shut down again. Behind Deseret, Tyne's voice was flat.

"Tell them, Shaan."

Deseret waited. She could defy Tyne; at this moment, she could break clean. She didn't. Her words came, mechanical and dull.

"My people will not fall prey to the outsider; he is not the one to save them. He is the *bringer* of the plague. To heed his word is to die. It is my wish; you will obey none but Tyne."

Somewhere in the night, a mountain cat screeched, distant and shrill. Deseret turned to Shaan. Her eyes didn't meet his. He knew, without looking at Tyne, that the proud, bitter smile had come back. Slowly, the frightened circle drew

away from Deseret. The bucks eyed him; one of them drew a skinning-knife free of its sheath. Deseret made his move. Slow, measured steps took him toward the broken form of the sick one. Deep in the crowd, a squaw wailed her fear. Deseret reached down to help the sick one to his feet. The bucks closed in. Sharp fingers clamped on Deseret's arms. He spun and threw a right. One of the Indians doubled, sprawling backward. A clubbed fist came down hard behind Deseret's ear. He went to one knee. Shaan's scream sounded far away. The buck with the knife loomed over him. The long blade went up.

"Hold!"

The bronze arm froze. The knife winked but did not fall. The voice had come from beyond the moonwashed circle. An aisle opened in the whispering mob. A woman hissed, "It is the old one who speaks."

KOSHKALLA came forward; his body was aged and unsteady, but the tall leanness of him had a certain nobility that time could not destroy. His eyes burned black in wrinkled pits. No one moved. The voice was deep, gentle.

"The white doctor speaks truth to the Pellys."

Tyne swore and took a step toward the old man. Koshkalla ignored him. He stood beside Deseret, facing the Indians.

"I am Koshkalla and full of years and under the father of Shaan I was revered as a wise man. Remember your dead chief and listen to my word. Many moons ago, when I was a stripling in my father's lodge, the days were when the fish of the rivers ran low, and the swelling sickness descended upon the Pellys. Then, too, the white man's medicine came; his needles pricked our skin, and we were made well. The tribe lived on. So can this man heal us. Shaan is a child, ruled by the same fear that holds us slaves."

Tyne said, "Shut up."

"A child we must defy, for her own good. For the good of the tribe!"

The words slurred. The whip left a livid welt across Koshkalla's temple. The gnarled legs buckled. The blacksnake went up to strike again. It didn't. Deseret caught the butt and twisted viciously. It tore free of Tyne's grip. Through clamped lips, Deseret said,

"You dirty rat."

Involuntarily, Tyne backed away. His feverish eyes blinked. Breath shook his narrow shoulders. "Shaan!" he yelled.

The girl had turned away. She kept moving toward the cabin door.

"Shaan!" It was a furious threat. She stopped. Tyne's gaze held hers. He had regained control of his voice.

"You will give them my command. The old devil is to be lashed. The torture of his body will atone for the disobedience of his mind."

"Tyne, no." Red lips trembled. Then, strength and hope went out of her eyes. There was nothing in them but the memory of that threat. Tonelessly, she repeated Tyne's order.

The circle of Indians surged in toward Koshkalla and the sick one. A lone growl went through the mob—the cry of an animal at bay, confused by terror, eager to turn its fear to hatred of something—anything.

Tyne laughed shortly. "Beasts," he said. "Stupid beasts."

Rough hands clamped on the old man's arms. Koshkalla moaned. Deseret made a move to interfere. That hunting knife dug into his rawhide shirt. Other knives were unsheathed, now. Deseret stayed put. He watched the sick one and Koshkalla hauled through the snow into shadows beyond the compound's edge. The mob followed hungrily. The clearing was empty and cold with moonglow. A dog whimpered sadly. Deseret caught a glimpse of the girl before she ran into the cabin's darkness. He thought she was crying.

Tyne fingered the whipbutt lovingly. He swayed a little; the laugh was too bright in his small eyes.

"I warned you, Doctor. On Crooked Creek Alix Tyne is king."

He turned and went up the porch steps. Pride had come back; it hid the limp of his warped foot. Deseret followed into the empty, fur-smelling room and closed the door behind him. Tyne was at the table. Nothing had happened. Tyne's smile and shrug made it seem that way. He pushed a drink toward Deseret and sat back, sipping comfortably at his own glass. A minute passed. Deseret waited. Then, it came.

"You know, my friend, it's foolish for us to fight. Crooked Creek has enough

for two men. The furs are rich, the . . . ah . . ." He laughed. "The labor is cheap. I could use a good man . . . a smart man."

Deseret didn't answer. The planes of his face were rigid. Tyne leaned forward on the table.

"You're a smart boy, Deseret. A boy with nerve. There's money here . . . all the women you want . . . respect . . . power . . . Admit it. Every man wants those things. Even you."

The lampwick whispered threats at the darkness. Deseret sat still. The words had hit too close to home. The thoughts were too familiar. He didn't like it at all. He felt a little sick. He swallowed the rum fast.

He said, "Maybe there's a price a man won't pay."

Tyne's grin went lopsided. "Such as?"

"Such as tearing down others to make yourself look big."

"The natives?" Tyne sneered. "I told you. Animals. Drunk, poor, riddled with disease."

"They weren't before you came."

Tyne stopped pouring the second drink. Deseret went on levelly.

"Before you came, they were well enough. And rich with the furs you cheat them out of, now . . ."

The chair scraped harshly. For a second, tense, Tyne stood over him, then relaxed.

"You talk big, Doctor." He sat down again. "And you can't do a damn thing. Nobody can. This is my world. Nice and private and safe. I turn plenty of pelts over to the Company. They're satisfied. And the Pellys make no complaint, so the government and law are helpless."

Deliberately, he finished filling the glass. He drank. Deseret nodded slowly.

"So, you're king. Master of a people you ruined, brought below your own level, so you could rule them. Oh, you're a big man here, Tyne—here, where all the others are cut down. But you wouldn't dare go into the outside; you couldn't face the real world of your equals."

Tyne's glass banged down too hard. His lips had gone white. The flush of his cheeks was unnatural. Deseret smiled; it wasn't pleasant.

"No, Tyne. You couldn't take that."

"Shut up."

"Outside you'd see how small you really are."

"I said shut up!"

"You'd smell the stink of your rotten power that ruins decent men."

Tyne stood abruptly, lunging toward Deseret. The table jarred. A jigger rolled off and splintered on the floor. But Tyne did not reach him. The thin legs seemed to go watery. Tyne swayed, grabbing the table-edge. He closed his eyes and held on tight. Like slow waves, shudder after shudder went through him. Cold sweat-beads broke across his forehead. Then, very carefully, he sat down again. The eyes that met Deseret's were blank with fear.

Deseret watched him without blinking. He saw whiskey spill into the pale beard when Tyne drank.

"Chills?" he said quietly. "Fever . . . vertigo . . .?"

Tyne nodded. The eyes remembered, now—remembered the sick one crumpled on the porch steps.

"I told them," he rasped. "I told them to keep away from me . . . Deseret, you think . . .?"

For a second, Deseret only stared. Then: "I think you drink too much. I think your nerves are shot . . . Be careful, Tyne. That fear you rule by could backfire on you . . . You used it to ruin others . . . It could just as easily ruin you."

The thin mouth worked. No words came. Deseret didn't wait. He turned and went out.

As he closed the door, the nervous clink of glass and bottle sounded again.

III

THE COMPOUND was gray and lifeless. Lodgefires smouldered, untended. The tracks of the Indian mob still ribbed the snow. Somewhere beyond the fir grove that crouched on the lip of Crooked Creek, a russet glow pulsed against the pallid sky. Watching it, Deseret's eyes narrowed. He listened, walking slowly toward the indigo darkness of the grove. Low and angry, like the heartbeat of a prowling cougar, the thunder of Pelly drums stalked the white silence. Deseret swore.

He moved quickly, now. He had for-

gotten Tyne. The drumbeats churned in his stomach, gaining strength and momentum. Deseret crushed through frosted undergrowth. Firelight leapt higher against the night. A soft, frenzied wail rose above the drums. Deseret cursed the blocking trees. Low branches scratched his face. He broke into a half-run, topping a steep rise. Then, abruptly, he came into the shallow, basin-like clearing.

The fire was at the center, deepset in a pit of blackened earth and ice. Its glow made the Indian shadows wild and tall against the brooding wall of trees. Squaws swayed to the rhythm of the tomtoms. Dark eyes were glazed with fear-born hatred. An ancient totem scowled and leared with the shifting fire shadows. To the right, a knot of braves stirred and came forward, dragging a limp form. A tall rack, made of skinned birch, stood before the fire. Koshkalla moaned, sagging at the knees. He hung, his thumbs lashed by rawhide to the high crossbar. The bucks stepped back. Brutal hands tore at the old man's robe. His bony torso lay bare. The drums hit an insane pitch. A huge Indian advanced. The dogwhip in his hand lifted . . .

Then, they saw Deseret. The chant strangled. Drums broke to clean, quivering silence. Like a wary beast, the crowd press back from Deseret. Someone said, "The Bringer of the Plague." A woman whimpered. The snapping of the fire was clear and brittle. Deseret walked quietly to the heart of the clearing. His face tightened when he saw the purple bruise that scarred Koshkalla's temple. But, when he spoke in dialect to the man with the whip, his voice was dead level.

"Flailing is liable to kill the old one."

The Pelly only stared. "It is the word of Shaan."

"No. Not the word of Shaan. The word of him who forces her to speak."

An uneasy murmur went through the mob. They pressed closer.

Deseret said: "You will release the old one."

The man with the whip stood still. "The disobedient are punished."

A voice cried, "The white one speaks evil!"

"His tongue is forked against Shaan."

"Against Tyne," Deseret said quietly.

"Against the Pellys; He would destroy us with the Black Death. He would lure us to the Hill of Taboo."

"Death! Death to the Bringer of the Plague!"

Fingers closed on Deseret's arms. A hard knee dug into his back. He swung clear of the whipper's sledgehammer fist. His shoulder slammed in under the guard; the thick belly gave. He had the Colt free.

He stood beside Koshkalla, feet apart, the glinting barrel levelled. The Pellys saw it. The tightening knot stopped cold. Bucks pressed back. A squaw screamed. The man with the dogwhip got to his feet and backed away. His eyes did not leave Deseret's taut trigger finger.

"The gun is not needed, white man."

The voice belonged to a woman. In dead stillness, the sunken fire wheezed and cracked. A squat figure elbowed through the crowd. Indians muttered. The woman stopped and looked at Deseret for an instant. Her pitted face was flat and ugly in the burnished light. Maya turned to the man with the whip and said quietly:

"You will not punish Koshkalla."

Surprise stammered from mouth to mouth. The massive buck coiled his whip carefully. His suspicious eyes were slitted.

"By order of a pockmarked hag?"

Shaan's servant shook her head.

"No, stupid one. By order of the Princess."

The murmur got loud. Gently, Deseret said, "Shaan sent you?"

Maya nodded. The Pellys exchanged questioning glances. The whipper's tone was heavy, doubting. "It is a trick. You would make the King angry at us. Shaan spoke his word. She would not change it, now . . ."

"I swear it," Maya said.

The clearing was still. The Indians only stared.

Maya said: "If I lie, may I die of the plague."

It worked. Without another word, the huge Indian drew out his knife and cut the thongs. Koshkalla sagged to the melted slush by the fire. Once, Maya looked at Deseret. Then, she turned and walked slowly back to the trading post. The Pellys waited a moment longer. Finally,

ESKIMO PIE

When in good condition, there is a layer of fat, two or three inches thick, deposited on the back and rump of the male caribou; late in the winter the females also acquire a layer of back-fat. To the Eskimo, this is as delicious as butter is to us. But the Chukchi, owners of the greatest reindeer herds in the world, have evolved a dish which they consider an improvement on plain back-fat; they beat together, with wooden mallets, reindeer meat and back-fat, and eat the mixture as we eat ice cream.

they followed. Empty night settled in on the shallow basin. Somewhere a wolf howled.

Deseret bent on one knee and turned the withered form over. Koshkalla's head fell back, then the neck stiffened. The glazed eyes blinked, focussing very slowly. Gnarled fingers clawed at Deseret's sleeve.

"It's all right," Deseret said. "They're gone."

Koshkalla relaxed. His breath was thick. The smile was feeble, but real. "I knew they could not frighten you away."

Deseret grinned back. He held a rawhide flask to cracked lips. "Here. Drink."

The old man coughed; whiskey spilled down his chin. He sank wearily against Deseret's knee.

"They are not to blame," he said hoarsely. "They but fear him, and obey Shaan."

"Shaan changed her order."

Koshkalla nodded. The wan smile came back.

"IT was the true Shaan who sent Maya. The daughter of a great chief who loves her people; who believes in tolerance and mercy . . . It is a pity, my friend, that you did not know my tribe many sleeps ago. We were proud, then. And rich in simplicity and happiness. We moved from the valley of the Pelly into the deep north to find this land of fur and plentiful game that men call Crooked Creek. Our braves were strong and afraid of nothing. In those days, Zoltan, the elder brother of Shaan, was our chief. He was a good man and gentle. He did not welcome the coming of Alix Tyne."

The old one shrugged faintly. "But, Tyne offered food in the frozen months when the moose and elk were scarce. For

our pelts, he gave us dried fish . . . and fire-water. The people were simple and full of faith. They urged Zoltan and, against his will, he accepted . . . Then, slowly, it came upon us. The downfall, the disease, the liquor-born fear of Tyne . . . Our women turned wanton with whiskey in their veins. Our braves fought amongst themselves and destroyed each other. And, watching our weakness grow, Tyne smiled."

Remembered anger flared in the aged eyes.

"Finally, the one called Thornton came to help us. Perhaps someone sent for him. Perhaps Zoltan. None ever knew. Thornton did not live long enough to tell us. At the time of his death, Zoltan, too, disappeared; dragged like the others by sickness and drink, he wandered one day into the hills. He did not return. Then it was that Tyne ruled absolute—then that Shaan began to obey him whom she had always loathed; and because Tyne commanded the child they must obey, the Pellys feared his as all powerful . . . It was he who marked the Hill of Taboo—a cliff to the north of our village. Regularly, food is sent to this hill, as to some unseen god. My people are in terror of it, for it is Tyne's word, given through Shaan, that none shall near it but he be cursed with the Black Death."

The dark gaze swung northward along the moonlit tundras. Now, Koshkalla's voice was only a whisper.

FAIR SWAP?

The island of Guadeloupe was a bone of contention between the French and the British when their representatives met, following the French and Indian War, to adjudicate a peace. Guadeloupe had sugar plantations of great value and the British wanted them. The French demurred, and offered instead to turn Canada over to the British. The British objected that, while Canada was larger than Guadeloupe, it was not a very valuable piece of property, and they held out for Guadeloupe and its sugar plantations.

It was our own Benjamin Franklin who found a way out of the impasse he recommended that the British accept Canada, chiefly because it was contiguous territory. Eventually the British got around to his viewpoint, but apparently they accepted Canada for political, rather than economic, reasons. And now Canada is the great NORTHWEST—but who can find Guadeloupe on the map?

"It is a hidden place . . . a dead place . . . Yet, it alone, perhaps, could tell us the secret of the power Tyne holds over Shaan."

Deseret didn't answer. He helped the old man to stand. The road back to the village was long. The warped legs moved very slowly and with pain. They reached Koshkalla's hut. The Indian sank heavily on the pallet of matted fur. His eyes had clotted again with the effort of motion. The words were thick in his throat.

"The Hill . . . the Hill holds the secret."

Deseret stood erect. He nodded.

"The Hill," he said quietly. "And Shaan, herself."

ALL but one of the cabin windows were dark. Near the rear door, the sickly glimmer of candles danced against the square of oiled paper. Deseret's mukluks whispered anxiously in the drifted snow. For a moment, he stood outside, listening. A low murmur came from the room beyond. His fingers were careful on the latch. Soundlessly, the door swung inward.

She knelt on a prayerrug before a candle lit altar of ancient Indian goods. Her eyes were closed in the still paleness of her face. Only the lips moved. Butterfly flames flickered with her breath. She spoke in the tongue of her people.

"...to thee, oh god of the sun and moon, ruler of the wind, giver of the leaping fish that is our food, master of my fathers before me . . .to thee, I open my heart. Of thee, I beg forgiveness. I would not destroy my people; I would not heed the poisoned tongue of this man Tyne. Yet, there is no other way. There . . ."

Shaan let out a small cry. She had opened her eyes. The planes of Deseret's face were hard and dark. She rose, backing away to the shadowed wall. The candles danced. Deseret said gently:

"You are not really afraid of me?"

The girl stared. Numbly, her head moved from side to side.

"You must go."

"Tell me, Shaan." He walked toward her slowly. "Why do you pray for forgiveness?"

A brief flare of defiance shut out the need of help.

"That is my affair. I do as I please. I know my own mind."

"Or, Tyne's mind?"

He was close, now; she could feel the strength of him. She was afraid of the knowledge behind his smile.

"It is a lie! I am Princess. My people obey only my will."

She tried to brush past Deseret. Hard fingers caught her shoulders. He could smell the freshness of her tawny skin. His voice was hoarse.

"Then, why ask your god to forgive you?"

A moment longer she struggled. Then, her eyes met his. Her body went soft; She lay against him, crying very quietly. His hands were gentle, now.

"What makes you do this, Shaan. Why?"

"Please . . ." The words were muffled against his chest. "Just . . .let me alone. You do not understand."

Deseret said: "I understand the Pellys. There's only one tie stronger than that of the clan . . . the blood-tie."

The lithe form stiffened. She drew away and turned her back. For a long time she didn't speak. When she did, the words were controlled and without hope.

"The questions are useless . . .Nothing can change."

He started to touch her arm. He didn't He said,

"Who are you protecting, Shaan?"

Her shoulders tensed but she didn't answer.

"Koshkalla told me of the Hill. What does it mean?" Gently, he turned her to face him. "You've got to tell me. For your people. For yourself."

A whisper of sound stopped him. The girl stared beyond him. Her lips parted; her eyes shadowed. Before he turned, Deseret knew Tyne was standing in the doorway. The small figure was rigid; one bony fist knotted and unknotted. Tyne smiled; it wasn't nice to see. He moved past Deseret to the girl. Faintly, the game foot scraped.

"You're a disobedient child, Shaan."

She screamed. Raw knuckles lashed across her lips. She stumbled back. The candleflames rose in the brief draught of her movement. She saw Deseret's fist close on the quillworked jacket. Tyne went

for the knife at his hip. A brutal knee pinned his wrist to the wall and ground hard. It was very quiet; only the animal breathing of the two men, then the sharp clatter of the knife against floorboards. Deseret collared the small man and slammed his right back and forth across the bobbing, twisted face. Tyne's nose bled; his lip was split. The old threat was raw in his mouth and laughed again.

Deseret said very softly: "I haven't quit yet."

"You will." The yellowish smile mocked him. "Thornton did."

The candles flickered. Deseret did not answer. He left.

IV

THE FIRST glare of sunup paled the sky. Idly, a chill wind brushed along the rimrock of Crooked Creek. It felt good against Deseret's face. The scent of Shaan's hair was still in his nostrils. His throat ached. He tried to forget her. He tried to think. It didn't take much thought. There was only one move left.

He crossed the deserted compound to the northern edge. The wind ruffled the fly of Koshkalla's tent. The inside smelled of old flesh and animal skins. It was still and dark. Slowly, Deseret's eyes focussed. Then, he swore. The fur pallet was empty. He spun and pushed into the open again. Outside the lodge, crusted snow was ridged and pocked with pawmarks and the trace of sledrunners. The prints headed North. Deseret's eyes went beyond the clotted shade of the spruce grove. Against the dying night, a snow-bound, trackless hill gleamed, faint and forbidding. Koshkalla had already made the last move.

His team was where he had left it. The malemutes were restless; the lead dog snapped playfully at his hands as he rigged the lines. Quickly, he unloaded the grub and bedroll. An empty sled rolled faster; there was no time to kill. No sound broke the dawn stillness. Only once in the shadows of the cabin porch, Deseret thought he sensed a movement. He ignored it, and lunged against the geepole. "Aiyee, mush!" The huskies yelped. Traces went taut. Crackin' free, the sled lurched forward. Deseret did not look back, but the

feeling that he was watched still nagged him.

Koshkalla's trail was easy to follow. Runner-scars cut through the grove, past the basin clearing, and hit out dead north across bleak, rolling tundras. Deseret's team hauled smoothly over the packed snow. The yipping of the dogs was shrill and eager on gray morning air. The ghost of the Hill of Taboo grew real, rising defiant against the sky. In spots the old Indian's tracks faltered and fumbled, then, doggedly, went on. In the foothills, the trail wound into a nest of scrawny fir. Abruptly, Deseret halted the team.

The Indian sled was turned on its side in a drift. One of the dogs lay unmoving in the traces. Blood matted the fur around the bullet wound in its chest. And, in the drift, mixed with the floundering steps of a man, there were other bloodstains. Deseret moved back to his own sled. Just ahead of him a small geyser of snow spouted suddenly. The warning whine of a rifle shot came a split second later. Deseret hit the ground face down. For a long moment he did not move. Then, very slowly, he crawled toward the shelter of a gnarled fir. Snow and ice puffed again, too close for comfort. The rifle-scream was nasty.

Deseret lay still, breathing fast. The shots had come from above. Searching the crotched hillside, his eyes found a small lean-to crouched on a ledge near the crest. A minute passed. It seemed like a lifetime. The silences settled in again. There were no more shots. Deseret did not follow the paling red of the old Pelly's staggered trail. Carefully, he circled the base of the hill through the low darkness of the wood.

Cold sweat chilled the small of his back. The scratch of his own mukluks chewed at his nerves. The hill was steep and matted with treacherous drifts. He climbed very slowly toward the rear of the lean-to. The Colt was in his hand; the trigger-finger was taut. Once, he froze against the white wall. On the ice-ledge before the hut, a guard moved back and forth. The sun shone pale on the Winchester in the crook of his arm. The guard didn't look his way; he kept pacing. Deseret edged forward, flattened against the rough

wall of the hut. The grind of boots got nearer. The figure half-rounded the corner toward Deseret. The guard stopped dead. He tried to swing the Winchester into position. Deseret dove.

The rifle-blast scorched across his shoulder. His left sank into the thick Indian gut. The guard spilled against the wall. He straightened, clubbing the Winchester. Deseret got under the blow. His fist crushed into the flat face. The Indian grunted and twisted clear. His elbow exploded behind Deseret's ear. Deseret went to his knees. He felt dizzy. A heavy boot dug into his side. He doubled. His shoulder ached. Indistinctly he saw the guard pulling the gun to one armpit. He rolled on his side and fired from the hip. The Colt's snap was lost in the roar of the Winchester. The wooden wall splintered above Deseret's head. The Indian hung over him for a second; then, the thick lips opened. Dark red bubbled down the lax chin. Numb fingers tried to lift the rifle again. They couldn't. The guard crumpled to one side and lay still in the reddened snow.

Deseret's legs weren't steady. He used his good shoulder against the hut door. It slammed inward. The single room was dark and smelled of rotten flesh. Koshkalla lay in one dusty corner. His hands were clasped over his stomach. The fingers were stained with drying blood. His eyes focussed on Deseret who stood swaying in the doorway. That weak smile managed to curve colorless lips.

"As I said . . . The Hill held the secret."

Koshkalla nodded toward the far wall. Deseret looked. The floorboards had been torn back. It wasn't a pretty sight. Crumbs of frozen flesh still clung to the skeletons, crammed in their shallow grave at unnatural angles. One of the skulls had been half-shattered by a bullet. The crooked neck was circled by a crude chain that held a bleached oval carved from the tusk of a bull-seal. Deseret's gaze swung back to Koshkalla. The old man nodded.

"The amulet of my tribe . . . Handed down by the Chief to his oldest son!"

"Zoltan . . ."

" . . . And the white man, Thornton . . ." Koshkalla coughed and sighed. A thin line of blood edged down his jaw. "The

guard saw me coming. He was not a bad shot . . . He brought me here to die . . . and I found . . ."

"Tyne's private graveyard . . ."

Deseret's mouth was a tight line. A moment longer, he stared at the skeletons. Then, consciously, he straightened and went to Koshkalla's side. "You got to get out of here . . . It's not safe."

The old Indian didn't say no. Deseret helped him up. The cough got worse. More blood came. They made the door and stopped.

Shaan stood just outside in the heatless glare of the sun. This time her hand didn't waver. The gun-muzzle was trained full on Deseret's chest. He stood very still. His voice was quiet.

IT was you that watched me leave the village."

"I told you," the girl said. "I warned you to let us alone . . ."

She took a step into the hut. Deseret caught her arm. She pulled back as though she'd been stung. Koshkalla sagged against the doorjamb, watching. Deseret said:

"You don't want to go in there."

Her knuckles were white, gripping the gunbutt. "No more of your tricks, white man. You'll never give my brother to the police . . . Zoltan!"

She brushed past Deseret into the dim room. The name died in her throat. Then, numbly, she moved closer to the shallow, unearthed grave. She saw the amulet. The gun slipped from nerveless fingers. She swayed. Deseret was beside her; she turned against him, suddenly small again, and soft and hurt.

"Don't look," Deseret said. "Just . . . don't look."

She cried; the sound was quiet, beaten, with a murmur of relief.

Deseret said: "You can stop being afraid, now. Now, you can tell me . . ."

"Yes . . ." She straightened; slowly, a new free strength came into her eyes. "It is all over now. All the lies and fear. It is hard to believe. I lived so long with them . . . Ever since the man Thornton died. Tyne told me Zoltan was the killer. He said Zoltan was hid in this hut. He bargained with me. If I ruled my people by his word, my brother

would be safe. If I refused, he would betray Zoltan to the authorities . . . I did not refuse. I could not know . . . this . . ."

She half turned toward the pit. Deseret stopped her. His voice was gentle, sure.

"He wanted to get rid of Thornton and your brother. They were too decent. They got in the way . . . I guess it was easy enough; just as easy as it is to lie to you, to make you believe Zoltan was alive by sending food to this place . . . to grind the Pellys below his level by playing his hold over you."

The wild screech cut across Deseret's words. In the doorway, Koshkalla lurched toward them three faltering steps. Before the warning cry died, a shot shattered the stillness. The old Indian went rigid. Thick wetness gurgled in his throat. He fell like a dead tree. The pool of red spread quickly on the floor near his mouth. The nails of one clawed hand dug into the floorboards. Then, tension went out of him with the last sighing breath.

"Don't move, Deseret."

His hand swung down toward the .45. He didn't draw. He stood quiet still. So did Shaan.

Tyne looked tall against the brilliant snowglare. His face was stiff, with feverish, sunken eyes. Even in cold morning air, he was sweating. The gun quivered dangerously in his taut grip. Behind him in a narrow circle, the Pelly braves pressed in. They seemed not to see Shaan; there was a blindness of fear in their twisted faces. Tyne laughed. The ragged sound echoed down sheer mountain wall.

"So, now you know, my friend. You couldn't play it smart. You didn't want a deal; no money, no power. Just big noble ideals . . ." The humor went out of his voice. "But, you always pay a high price for knowledge, Doctor."

The bucks murmured restlessly, edging forward. Deseret's throat felt tight. He kept his tone level. It wasn't easy.

"You won't kill me, Tyne. You're forgetting Shaan. She knows the truth, now. She'll stop her people."

The thin nervous mouth twitched. Slowly, the smile returned.

"You underestimate me, Doctor. Sure. She can talk to them. But they won't listen. Not anymore. You see, Shaan has

turned against them. She's sold herself to the Bringer of the Black Death . . . And the Pelly who obeys her, now, will be cursed with the plague . . . Fear, Deseret. You know the technique. The power of fear over animals." The narrow blond head jerked from side to side. "No . . . You'll die. So will she. And the secret dies with you. Like I always planned; this'll be my land . . . my world . . . completely."

The words had gone shrill and unbalanced. Fever burned brighter in the wide eyes.

Deseret waited. Stillness closed in again. Then, deliberately, he moved toward the door. Shaan's fingers brushed his arm.

"No . . ." He did not stop. Tyne went rigid. The gunhand itched.

"I said stay put."

Deseret kept coming. When he spoke, it was clear and hard in the dialect of the Pellys.

I wouldn't fire if I were you, Tyne. If I go, your only chance goes with me."

Tyne's mouth worked. He looked less sure. He wiped sweat from his chin with one sleeve. The smile was forced, now.

"It's a trick. But it won't work. Stalling won't save you."

Deseret was close. Beyond Tyne the Indians muttered confusion. The gunhand twitched.

"Remember what I told you, Tyne? Fever, dizziness, cold sweat."

"Drink . . . You said it was whisky . . . overwork."

"Did I? Maybe I lied, Tyne. You know the symptoms. They could mean smallpox."

A surge of terror flooded through the Pellys. Wild eyes swung on Tyne. Slowly, the tight circle edged back, away from him. The wiry figure swayed. Deseret's voice was very soft.

"You don't feel well, do you, friend? You feel dizzy?"

"You're lying! It's rum . . . nothing but the stinking rum."

"Maybe I am lying . . . But, you can't be sure . . . Can you, Tyne?"

"Shut your face!"

"KILL me and you'll never be sure . . . till it's too late."

The Colt kicked in Tyne's fist. The

flash was yellow and hot. Shaan screamed. Acrid smoke cleared. The Pellys sucked in air. Tyne staggered back a pace. Deseret was still standing.

"See what I mean? Your eyes are going bad. The fever's getting you."

"No . . ."

"You're sick, Tyne. You've got the plague."

Tyne kept moving back. His gaze flicked anxiously to the Indians.

"They'll take care of me," he said thickly. "You will care for your King."

Nobody answered. The circle widened away from him. Deseret closed in, smiling thinly.

"You see, friend? You're wrong. Why should they help you? Cast out the sick ones. That was your own order."

The ledge was narrow; the drop was sheer and jagged. Tyne didn't notice. He didn't notice anything but Deseret's voice.

"You know the technique. Fear. It's your own instrument turned against yourself. You made them deadly afraid of the plague, Tyne. That was part of your hold over them. Only now it's backed up on you . . . Your world's crumbling, little man. The Black Death drags you down to their level. They fear you, but they fear it more . . . so much more, that they defy you . . . Why don't you say something, Tyne? Who's afraid, now? Go on. Tell me."

"You son of a . . ."

He got the gun up. His finger knotted on the trigger. Deseret was too close. He came in under the wild shot. His left dug into the shallow chest. Tyne's face warped. He brought the gunbarrel down hard. Metal grazed Deseret's jaw. He slid to one side. Tyne lurched backward crazily, trying to draw bead. Iced shale slithered from the ledge. Loose turf sagged under his heel. Deseret yelled, "Look out!" and made a grab for him. He missed. The scream was long and high and slow-dying. Clods slugged away. Nobody saw Tyne hit bottom. When they looked, his body was a small, broken blot against the jagged white of the foothills. Slowly, Deseret straightened.

Shaan was beside him. Blood had soaked through his rawhide shirt. But, the

arm-wound was shallow; all it needed was a bandage. Shaan's voice was gentle, concerned.

"I thought he missed you."

Deseret smiled wearily. "So did Tyne."

For a moment the girl stared down into the valley. "Twisted bitter little man, destroyed in the end by the plague."

Deseret shook his head. "Not the plague, lady. Just drink and overwork . . . and fear."

A murmur went through the bucks. They looked at Deseret. The afraidness was gone from their eyes. There was nothing now, but a shadow of new, growing hope, a flicker of respect. It was good to see, Deseret thought. Almost as good as Shaan's smile.

He said quietly: "We'll go back to the village, now. There's a lot to be done."

The men moved eagerly. It wasn't just obedience. It was something they wanted to do. There was life in the way they handled the sleds. Even in the burial of Koshkalla, there was nothing sad. And, it seemed, that was as it should be; as the old one would have wanted it. Once, as they rigged the dogs, Deseret heard an Indian laugh. It sounded fine.

He looked at Shaan. Her face was flushed; the warm eyes held his, young again and frank and full of promise.

"You will not leave Crooked Creek now?"

He laughed and guided her to a sled; he tucked the fur robes about her legs. The scent of her skin was very near.

"Not right off," he said. "Your people need care . . . good food . . . sanitation . . . inoculations . . ."

The bright laughter of Shaan's eye shadowed.

"But, in the end, when the work it done . . . you will go . . . There are richer places . . . finer people . . . You will not stay forever."

Deseret smiled, taking hold of the lines. "Forever is a long long time, lady."

Impulsively, her small hand covered his. "But . . . maybe not . . . for us?"

The dogs yelped happily. The sleds hit out along the road back. Deseret's smile deepened.

"No," he said softly. "Maybe not . . . for us."



GRAVEYARD FALLS

By JOHN BEAMES

"Last year it was Cockeye Moley. Year before it was Chuck Cheney. Wonder whose turn it will be this year," groaned Jimmy the Glum as he cast a mournful look at perilous Graveyard Falls.

TWO DRY LOGS, laid side by side, made a fire twelve feet long. The bow crew gathered around the blaze to smoke and talk for a little while before rolling in. The air of the April night was sharp with frost, and the long lances of the northern lights were hurtling across the sky.

A thin chilly breeze set the spruces rustling stiffly. The river below was si-

lent under its blanket of logs, but the muffled rush and roar of Graveyard Falls was plainly audible in the distance.

"I wonder whose turn it will be this year," said Jimmy the Glum in his scratchy voice. "Last year it was Cockeye Moley. The year before it was Chuck Cheney."

Monk Cheney's ugly little face twitched at mention of his brother's name, and he

bent forward to look toward Herb Frost with an angry gleam in his deepset eyes.

"They wasn't smart," said Herb, stretching out his long legs and putting back his broad shoulders. "A feller don't need to be scared of the falls if he's smart."

"There he goes again, tootin' his own horn," snapped Monk.

"And there's the monkey yippin' again," retorted Herb with lazy good nature. "I can't help it if I'm smart, can I? I drove the falls five years now and nothin' never happened to me yet. Cockeye Moley missed his jump. I didn't."

"You was in too much of a hurry to stop and give him a hand," accused Monk. "The same with my brother Chuck. When you're savin' your own dirty hide you got no time to help nobody."

"When a jam pulls," answered Herb, "it's every man for himself. I couldn't of helped Chuck anyways. A log spit out and hit him. Only way I got clear myself was jumpin' down in the Pot—twenty foot."

Monk was trembling all over. "I was told you left Chuck hold her while you got away," he charged passionately.

"Whoever told you that was a damn liar," returned Herb. "Tell me who he was and I'll say so to his face."

"Aw sure, you'd talk your way out. You're smart all right," said Monk. "Smart at takin' care of yourself."

"Better roll in, boys," came the deep voice of Nighthawk Cantlon, the push. "Got a hard day ahead of us tomorrow."

The men rose slowly and drifted into the tents to roll themselves in their blankets on the bare ground.

"Why you always buckin' Herb Frost?" asked Dickie Spry in a low voice. "He's four times your size. One day you'll make him mad and he'll paste hell out of you."

"I blame him for my brother," said Monk. "Damn him, he let Chuck die while he saved his own stinkin' hide. One of these here days I'm goin' to show him up for the yaller pup he is."

"Well, maybe you will," agreed Dickie in a soothing tone, "But meantime lay off on him. It just makes you look ridiculous."

It seemed to the men that they had hardly closed their eyes when they heard

Nighthawk's mellow tones calling, "Daylight in the swamp, boys. Rise and shine."

The breath of the men smoked in the grey dawn as they made a rush for the hot cakes, fried salt pork and tea being dished out by the cookee.

A little while later they filed off along the drive path, their peavies clinking on their shoulders. They passed the place where the logs had been purposely jammed the day before, and descended into the deep, narrow gorge where the river went frothing down to Graveyard Falls.

Nighthawk posted his thirty men at short intervals along the channel to watch for gilpokes and incipient jams. At the upper fall, a vertical drop of eight feet, he stationed Monk and Dickie, and went on down the steep path beside the fall with Herb Frost and big Pug Warren.

This brought them to the Snaggletooth, a mass of rock curving out like a huge fang from one wall, so that the stream had to make a sharp turn around it.

ON the other side, at right angles to the upper fall, the water rushed down an almost sheer drop of fourteen feet into the Pot, a seething pool where cross currents fought and hissed under a light cloud of vapor.

The gang breaking back now began to let loose a few logs at a time, trying as far as possible never to have more than four or five abreast in the channel.

When these reached the upper fall, Monk and Dickie straightened them out with long pikepoles so that each log went over end-on, for crossed lgs were dangerously liable to cause a hanging jam.

The timbers dipped smoothly to the fall and then were hidden in the boiling froth. They could be heard striking submerged rocks with a hollow booming. Then they shot to the surface, whipped around the Snaggletooth, and pitched over the lower fall at all angles into the Pot.

For more than an hour Monk and Dickie, toiling incessantly, could see Herb and Pub below them, sitting on the rock, smoking and idly watching the logs spin and wallow by.

"Damn him, he always picks the soft spots," said Monk.

"Soft enough when they run good," agreed Dickie, "but . . ." He broke off to

jab at a log that was passaging across the channel.

A big stick overrode it, and a group of six or seven followed close. There was a welter of bobbing timbers under the fall, and then the whole mass rushed at the Snaggletooth.

A gilpoke slithered up the rock, a big log riding its tail, the remainder ganging. A jam would have formed in an instant.

But Herb bounded to his feet, snagged the gilpoke with his peavy and jerked it up and out. Pug threw an end-check into the riding log and bore down.

Herb flipped the gilpoke over it, and almost in the same motion twisted a following log straight and gave it a hard boost.

The tangle went swiftly over the fall and the danger was over.

Dickie shook his head in admiration. "You got to hand it to him," he said, "that was smart work. It ain't often you see a big man that catty. Pug's like a cow compared with him."

"Aw, he's smart and catty on stuff," conceded Monk grudgingly. "But he's still got a big mouth and he's yaller inside."

"Yaller or no," said Dickie, "he's the slickest handler of the crooked steel on this little old ditch."

The day went by. The upstream plugs were skilfully broken out and the logs kept running thin. Once away, they were kept from ganging and passed over the upper fall in strict line.

A couple of times jams threatened on the Snaggletooth, but Herb was on the alert. Pug was good where a powerful heave or thrust were required, but he was slow, and it was Herb's lightning motions that really kept the fall clear.

At seven that evening—the men had been at work since five in the morning—Nighthawk allowed the logs to jam upstream, and climbed the bank to cry his long, "Lul-lul-lul-lahooy."

The men came trudging hungrily back to camp and supper.

Herb was in his most boastful mood. "Nothin' to it," he said in his loud voice. "We could have had plenty jams on the Snaggletooth only I was right there with my stuff. A feller just needs to know his job and be catty, and the falls is safe as

sailin' matches in a ditch. Nothin' to it a-tall."

"Don't give no credit to nobody else for keepin' the logs runnin' right," observed Monk. "That's him all the time. He makes me sick."

That night, a heavy rainstorm, mixed with sleet and snow, broke over the river. The men could hear it drumming on the tents when they waked momentarily from sleep.

It was still drizzling when they rolled out in response to Nighthawk's hail. Everything was damp, chilly and cheerless.

But what deepened the furrow on Nighthawk's brow was the state of the river. It had risen a couple of feet, and while higher water over the falls would be a help, the flood would bring down snags and deadheads. These floated submerged, and could cause tight jams before they were seen in the muddy water.

As the men wolfed their breakfast standing in the raw drizzle, Jimmy the Glum croaked, "This here's where we get it. I mind we had a storm just like this the year Paddy O'Donnell got his. The water was muddy and he didn't see a big snag..."

"Aw, shut up," shouted Herb. "This here extra water is just what we need. The stuff will go over the falls like a greasy pig through a gate."

The logs ran well until mid-morning. About ten the men got out their haversacks and began to eat their first lunch. Little Dodgie Post, up near the head of the chute, pointed and shouted with his mouth full, "Bi' shnag comin'."

In the shallows, a long brown thing rolled and threshed for a minute, stubs of broken branches sticking up like quills on a porcupine, then rolled off into deeper water.

A few minutes later a mysterious center jam formed in front of Poky Sims. Poky swore and laid down his lunch. All along the chute men dropped their haversacks and picked up their peavies.

They jumped on logs or ran down along the slippery ledges by the water, but a considerable plug had formed before they were able to break it out. The entire mass moved down on the upper fall.

"Well, here she comes," said Dickie re-

signedly. "There'll be all hell to pay now."

They got the first score or so of logs over safely. Then arrived the snag, a dead tree sixty feet long, bristling with stubs and dragging great curved roots. The top stuck out over the lip of the fall, slewed and wedged tight. In a matter of moments a hanging jam had formed.

Dickie bawled down to Herb and Pug, "Come on up and give us a hand."

Herb, sitting comfortably on the Snaggletooth, waved a hardboiled egg at him and grinned. "We'll look after her when she hits us," he called back. "Got to eat now."

Monk and Dickie worked frantically to pry a wing loose, and men from above joined them by ones and twos.

Word had gone upriver to hold the logs, but several hundred were loose already, and before a jam could be got to hold, the chute was plugged for a hundred yards above the falls.

Nobody was anxious to venture out on the mass poised precariously over the sheer drop. They pulled logs out along the sides and rolled them over, but this had no effect whatever only the main jam which only packed tighter.

"When this here goes out," said Jimmy the Glum mournfully, "Somebody's goin' with her."

Slim Tarle struck him a backhand slap across the mouth. "Shut your damned head," he growled, "Monk's tacklin' her."

The stumpy little lumberjack, his leathery face screwed up until he more than ever resembled a monkey, was picking his way gingerly across the jam crest.

"He's got plenty guts but damn poor judgment," observed Poky. "But good luck to him anyway."

"Hey," shouted Nighthawk, who had arrived hurriedly along the drive path. "Get back there, you. You got to be roped first."

A long cable had been coiled for just such emergencies on the top of the cliff. First a light line was taken across and then the heavier rope hauled over. A dozen men on each side of the gorge tailed on.

Dangling by a loop around his waist, Monk was drawn out and lowered until his feet rested on the dead tree.

With everybody watching tensely, he

began the chop right under the nose of the jam.

"Hoist," roared Nighthawk. They jerked Monk clear as the jam pulled unexpectedly, spilling over the fall in a confused jumble of logs.

Swinging there, Monk could see what happened on the Snaggletooth. Herb and Pug were caught by surprise as the timbers came rolling and plunging toward them, but they sprang up and tried to divert the mob around the rock.

Herb tossed big sticks this way and that with superb ease, and Pug heaved and tugged with tremendous power, but the logs kept snaking up the Snaggletooth and overriding.

Monk noticed that Herb was gradually working his way out of the danger zone, at the same time shouting to Pug, "Hold her there, hold her."

PUG battled on doggedly, too slow-witted to be fully aware of his peril. The timbers suddenly locked on the brink of the fall, and the jam began to spread as it rose, logs toppling over the side.

He at last realized his danger and turned to run, but found himself in the cleft between the Snaggletooth and the cliff. Before he could claw his way up, a log struck him and pinned him against the wall.

He shouted, "Herb, hey, Herb. I'm caught."

"Just in a minute," was the reply. "I'm in a tight spot myself."

He had Snaggletooth between himself and the main body of the jam, and could have climbed over the rock and gone to Pug's aid, but he remained where he was.

For once, however, his anxious care for his own safety was at fault. Had he gone to Pug's assistance, he might have been able to work back to the path up the cliff, but in a few minutes the logs had risen so high that they showed signs of pushing over the top of the Snaggletooth and sweeping him off into the Pot below.

Monk bawled to Nighthawk, "Pug's caught down there."

"Can you see 'em?" the push called back. "I can't see either one of 'em."

"Sure," replied Monk. Pug he's in under the cliff, in a bad spot. The other guy's over on the Snaggletooth. Get the

boys to ease me along down river so I can get to Pug."

Keeping parallel with each other, the two groups at the ends of the cable moved down the gorge, Monk dangling and swinging in midair between them.

"All right, lower away," he called at last. "Ease off on the west bank. I want in under the cliff.

He alighted on the logs just above Pug. "Are you hurt?" he asked.

"I think my arm's broke," was the reply, "but what's holdin' me is this here log across my back. I can't move and it's hard to breathe. Get me out, Monk, quick."

From the other side of the Snaggletooth came Herb's urgent plea, "Never mind him, come and get me. This stuff's comin' down on my head in a minute."

"Well, jump in the Pot," replied Monk indifferently. "You told me you done it before."

"But there was logs down there then," wailed Herb. "Now there ain't any, and it's forty feet deep and I can't swim. I'll be drowned sure."

"Nothin' to me," answered Monk. "You're welcome. But Pug's in bad shape, and I'm gettin' him out before I bother with you."

Nighthawk was lying on his stomach on the edge of the cliff above, craning his neck to try and see what was going on.

Herb bawled up to him, "Throw me a rope, throw me a rope."

"He's all right," said Monk. "It's Pug that's jammed up against the rock with a log at his back. Send me down a peavy and another line. If I work fast maybe I can get him out before the jam piles over on him."

"Shall I send some men down?" asked the push.

"No, it ain't safe. The whole works might pull any minute. Hurry up with that there peavy."

The peavy came dangling down on a rope.

Monk was not a large man, but there was a lot of strength in his short thick arms and sturdy legs. He heaved and pried until he had cleared a space around Pug.

Then he got down beside him with his axe. "Hold still, -old-timer," he warned.

"I ain't got much room to swing and this here's goin' to come pretty close to you."

Pug with difficulty turned his face to smile up at his rescuer. "You're a good head, Monk," he said.

Herb was still yelling. "Throw me a rope. Get me out of here."

Ropes were thrown, but he could not reach any of them. Nighthawk called down to Monk, "Say, couldn't you pass a rope along to him?"

"I'm busy," was the grim reply. "Either I get Pug out of here right away or the logs'll pinch in on him. Won't hurt the other feller to bawl a little."

He chopped hard but cautiously, mindful of the ominous creaking and groaning of the logs around and above him, and the water that was steadily rising up towards Pug's face.

The log was almost cut through. He caught up the peavy and pried it over. Pug groaned and clawed his way to his feet with one hand, the other hanging uselessly by his side.

Monk whipped the rope around him and knotted it under his arms. "Hoist away," he shouted. "Easy with him, his arm's broke."

He steadied the man's legs as he was drawn up to safety.

"Now, haul me up a little," he directed, "till I see can I do anything for the other guy."

THEY lifted and set him down on the crest of the jam that now hid the Snaggletooth. He could feel it quivering under his feet, and at any moment it might break and go cascading down into the Pot.

Herb's white face stared up at him from the narrow ledge where he hung.

Monk's own face was hard. "Well, wise guy," he said, "can you figure a way out of this, you that's so smart?"

"Help me, Monk," begged Herb. "I'll never forget you as long as I live if you do."

"You let my brother Chuck die," Monk reminded him.

"I didn't," screamed Herb. "I tried to help him, but I couldn't."

"Yaller and a liar," commented Monk. "I heard Pug holler to you to help him, but you stayed where you thought you were safe. I don't know why I wouldn't

let you stay there. I don't see where I can help much."

"Don't say that," whined Herb. "I'll be different after this. Help me, Monk, for God's sake, help me."

"Guess I can't stand by and see even a yallar dog die," said Monk reluctantly. "But it's goin' to be touch and go. No sense throwin' you a rope—if you was to try and climb up there you'd bring the logs down on you right away."

He was untying the rope about his own waist as he spoke. "Give me some more slack," he shouted up to Nighthawk. "More, more. Enough to reach this coyote."

"But what about you?" asked the push.

"Give me some more slack," was the curt reply.

He walked as close as he dared to the lip of the toppling jam, and tossed the loop down to Herb. "Hurry up with that," he directed. "You ain't got much time."

With trembling fingers Herb made himself fast, and Monk gave the word to hoist away. He waited until he saw the big lumberjack swing clear, then turned and raced for the cliff, the logs beginning to roll and tumble under his feet.

The jam pulled with a roar, logs shooting far out and turning end for end as they hurtled down into the Pot.

They dragged Herb to safety, but of Monk there was no sign. Ignoring the rescued man, the crew flung themselves down on the brink of the cliff and searched the turmoil below their eyes. No human being could live in that welter of timber and foam.

Said Jimmy the Glum, "It was Herb's turn, but Monk he took it away from him. You can't beat the falls, they got to have their man."

Dickie Spry walked up to Herb. "You let him save your life, but you didn't try to do nothin' for him," he said.

"How could I?" stammered Herb. "I would of only . . ."

"No, that's the way it always is with you," said Dickie in cold disdain. "Well, let me tell you, a hell of a lot better man than you'll ever be is gone and you're still here."

He turned on his heel and spat.

The logs ran for a few minutes and then held up again.

"Some of you boys go down river and see can you find any trace of Monk," said Nighthawk sombrely. "We'll hold the jam up for awhile."

No one showed any disposition to move. They stood staring despondently at the water, muttering to themselves that any man who drove Graveyard Falls was a fool.

They were so preoccupied with gloomy thoughts that they did not notice Monk coming up behind. At his cheery, "Hello, folks," they whirled in amazement.

"Well, Monk, how in hell . . . ?" yelled Dickie.

"I just done what that big bluff could of done if he'd been smart enough," answered Monk, with a jerk of his thumb toward Herb. "There's a narrer ledge just around the edge from the falls. When the plug pulled, I grabbed ahold of it and hung on until the logs quit runnin', and after that I just came back up the path."

He looked Herb up and down. "I guess you are a smart guy at that," he commented with bitter scorn. "You can always get somebody else to help you out."

"Well, boys," said Nighthawk briskly, "I guess we'd best get down and try and break that jam before she decides to get any worse."



A Fiction House Magazine





Oo-Lik, The Polar Bear

By BURTON R. PECK

The cub of the Arctic tigress learns a valuable lesson—the best defensive is an offensive . . . and the price of peace in the ruthless Northland is war.

NANOOK could not be called beautiful, except that motherhood seems to enhance whatever pleasing characteristics a polar bear may have. Her jaws were bloody from the caribou meat she had eaten during the past three days—her first meals since the beginning of her hibernation in November. Her cream-white fur was soiled and unkempt. She was scrawny. And when she walked, her paunch nearly brushed the hard-packed snow. At the moment she was recuperating from the twin ordeals of hibernation and motherhood; Oo-lik, her six-weeks-old cub, was sheltered from the wind by her mother's recumbent form.

3—Northwest—Winter

It was now the middle of March. Another week would usher in the spring solstice; but King Winter still held this vast domain in his grip. The sun rose feebly over the boundless waste, tempering the cold light of the Arctic day. Later, in its perennial battle with the ice-encrusted land and the frozen sea, the sun would gain the upper hand. Then the seals would enlarge their winter breathing holes in the ice, and crawl out on top to sun themselves. Nanook looked forward to this annual period of abundance.

In the fourteen years since first she had seen this scintillating world, Nanook had roamed the drifting ice-fields that lay between Alaska and the North Pole. She

had tramped the treeless plain from Point Barrow to the Mackenzie River. On one occasion a magnificent old male (the father of See-ko, her third cub), had persuaded her to accompany him as far as Siberia—and had then abandoned her. She had fought more than one fight, on that foreign shore, with an enraged cow walrus bent on defending her calf.

Of all the animals in the Northern Hemisphere, explorers rated her and her kind the most dangerous beast of prey; the only species known to stalk a hunter.

In the frigid waters of the Arctic Ocean, Nanook could outmaneuver the elusive seal, and snap its neck with a single crunch of her mighty jaws. On the flat strip of tundra that rimmed the north coast of Alaska, every creature except man moved aside for her. With her long, ebony claws, she could rake the shoulder or tear out the jugular vein of a musk-ox.

On this particular morning, however, she was not the savage Arctic tigress; she was the compassionate mother. About her lay the snow-covered tundra that stretched from the northernmost spur of the Rockies to the shores of the Arctic sea. Her cub lay curled in a tight little ball at her feet, fast asleep. He whimpered as he lay there, like a hound after a chase.

The sound awakened the mother bear; she touched Oo-lik with her black-tipped nose, and thus assured herself that he was all right. The soles of her paws were tender from her first journey in three months, and she was weak; but she rose to her feet and scrutinized, in her deliberate fashion, the white valley and the blue, cloudless sky.

Nanook walked over to some dwarf willows and snipped off a few buds; she pawed away the snow and ate a few mouthfuls of reindeer moss, as a hound would eat grass. Her digestive tract was not functioning properly, following her long fast and her three daily meals of caribou meat and back-fat. On the previous day's journey, an Arctic fox had picked up her trail, and had followed at a respectful distance. Now he came nearer. The old she-bear despised foxes above all creatures on land, at sea, or in the air. They were the abject and contemptible vultures that followed her everywhere and fed voraciously on the remnants of her

feasts. After she had killed a seal, the foxes would stand about, well out of reach of her devastating claws, watching hungrily as she deftly sheared off the delicious layer of blubber, and devoured as much as her stomach could hold of the warm, red meat that lay underneath. Gorged to repletion, she would then seek the shelter of an ice cake, and fall asleep. At the end of her nap, she would invariably find the seal's bones scraped clean, and the foxes sitting nearby, licking their chops.

The fox now circled about until he caught the scent of the cub. Here was an odor that he had never had an opportunity to classify. The mother bear watched as the stealthy scavenger came warily up-wind. The white fox weighed not more than eight pounds, and he stepped softly. But the hard-packed snow amplified the crunch of his footsteps, and transmitted the sound along the crust to the ears of the sleeping Oo-lik.

Suddenly the cub was awake, all senses alert. There was nothing in sight—not even his mother; but he experienced a strange feeling that he was being watched by hostile eyes. With a surprising amount of courage for one so young, Oo-lik sprang to his feet. His mother had encouraged him to take the initiative in the fight for life in this snow-covered world, where only the crafty and powerful survived. The cub was no weakling; but everything was new and strange, and therefore formidable. Right now he wanted his mother!

Oo-lik clambered to the top of the snow-drift, and looked about. There in the willows was his mother! The cub, to place himself under her protection was about to dash down the slope when he caught the movement of a white, bushy tail. Startled, he turned and saw, less than twenty feet away, two sharp eyes peering over the top of another snow-drift.

Without waiting for a second glance, the cub, certain that he was being stalked by a dangerous animal, ran crying in the direction of his mother. The fox followed cautiously. Oo-lik had taken half a dozen steps when the blood of a thousand generations of Arctic kings reasserted itself, and he faced about, ready for battle. The fox, surprised at this quick maneuver, stopped. Silently they eyed each other.

With all their senses of sight, smell, and hearing, the two Arctic animals felt each other out, each trying to classify the other. Then, abruptly and without really meaning to do so, Oo-lik bared his slender, white teeth and growled deep in his quivering throat. Everything in this Arctic empire moved aside for his mother; and this slinking, snow-white intruder must move aside for him.

The cub's diminutive roach stood stiff along the back of his sturdy neck, like the mane of a lion cub. The menacing sounds that issued from his tiny throat were as much of a surprise to him as they were to the fox; he had not known he could growl! Again he bared his teeth, and took a step toward the fox. Much to his surprise, the newcomer turned and ran!

Nanook saw this part of her progeny's performance; she was proud of her cub. No blood had been shed, but Oo-lik had won his first victory. Moreover, he had learned a valuable lesson: the best defensive is an offensive; and the price of peace in the Arctic is war! She touched his nose with her own as he swaggered up to her, his eyes flashing.

ABOVE the mother and her cub, on a broad, outstretched pinions, soared a snowy owl. His coal-black eyes, with their gleaming yellow irises, were taking in every detail of the snow-covered plain. Foxes, gulls, lemmings, and Arctic hares fled or took wing at his approach. For the shining black talons of this grim and relentless bird of prey were the sharpest and most destructive weapons—for their size—in this northern world. He was the incarnation of Nature's law—that the strong shall prey upon the weak. The snowy owl was the King of the Air.

Swinging her head ponderously, the old she-bear watched the owl as he circled above the intricate runways of the lemmings. Imitating his mother in this, as in all things, Oo-lik stood at her side, fascinated at the ease with which the killer soared above him. Suddenly the owl dived, stretched forth his talons, grasped one of the white, short-tailed rodents, and flew off toward some outcropping rocks.

While the polar bear was the most formidable of all the animals in this glisten-

ing domain, even he made way for man, the crafty, tireless creature who walked upright. Each spring, as Nanook searched for food, she saw them, sometimes walking alone; sometimes with dog-teams, and at other times migrating with their entire possessions of a single sled. She sometimes saw them, after her period of hibernation every other year, on their solitary hunts over the coastal plain. She watched them stalk the caribou, driven out of the hills by myriads of mosquitoes, when these animals came down to the tundra to drown the pests in ponds of melted snow. The two-legged creatures dressed in the skins of caribou and wolves. They were brown, and they carried long sticks which sometimes made a roaring noise louder than the thunder. And this was accompanied by a cloud of smoke, white and feathery, like the breath of a caribou on a winter day.

Once, when she was four years old, Nanook had been down-wind from a group of hunters, and the acrid fumes from their smoke-sticks had irritated her sensitive nostrils. Ever afterward she connected the belching of flame and the smell of smoke with danger and death. Two years later, on the ice-covered Koopow-rook, she had seen half a dozen caribou stumble and fall, immediately after a great smoking and roaring of these weapons.

Nanook was by nature a night prowler. Now, after three daily meals of caribou meat and back-fat, and a battle with a team of Eskimo dogs, she should have continued her journey toward the coast. But Oo-lik made known in rather peremptory fashion, that he wanted his mother's milk. In fact, he gave her no peace until she sat upright in the snow, with her back against the rocks. Rearing on his hind legs, the cub sucked until his appetite was satisfied. Like his mother, he was gluttonous by nature. Like her, he felt drowsy after a hearty meal. Now he curled up in the snow, and was soon fast asleep. There was nothing for the mother bear to do but follow his example.

SCARCELY had they fallen asleep (or so it seemed to Nanook) when an explosion shattered the silence of their icy domain. It was the sharp, spiteful crack of one of those murderous smoke-sticks.

Instinctively she flattened herself upon the snow. The movement awakened the cub, and he sensed the fear and apprehension that gripped his mother. He whimpered for a moment, and she silenced him with her fore-paws. Cautiously the old she-bear raised her head and looked over the top of the snow-drift. From the direction of the sun came the howling of dogs, followed by two other sharp reports. Climbing higher on the snow-drift, but keeping her body below the top, the mother bear saw a sight that chilled her blood. Swaying dizzily, with his left fore-paw hanging limp, and surrounded by a pack of huskies, stood a huge polar bear. He had no cover. There was no friendly rock at his back. He was completely at the mercy of two Eskimo hunters. Nanook shrank from the sight.

The cub, however, was curious. Except for the killing of a few caribou by wolves, he had seen no carnage in his six weeks of existence. Climbing up the drift, he snuggled close to his mother, and peered over the top. There, on a level spot amid all that desolation, the magnificent, cream-white bear stood at bay. Blood from his fore-paw and two body wounds darkened the snow. The dogs snapped at his heels. At a safe distance stood two of the little brown creatures.

Oo-lik raised his head a little higher as one of the hunters placed a smoke-stick to his shoulder and squinted along it. To the cub, there was nothing menacing in this movement; was not the hunter a long way off? But he sensed that the dogs were a distinct threat; and he wished that his mother would run off and hide somewhere. He had seen what wolves, with their slashing, dripping fangs, could do to a caribou herd. And, to his immature mind, there was little difference between an Eskimo dog and a wolf.

The sagacious old she-bear laid a restraining fore-paw upon the restive cub; to move now might attract attention. Besides, there was something vaguely familiar about the old male. Could he be Oo-lik's father? Nanook wondered. She had had so many mates; and not one of them had remained with her more than a few days. They knew nothing of the responsibility of fatherhood.

The cub was enthralled by the drama

unfolding before him. These hunters were neither as large nor as powerful as his mother, yet she was badly frightened. Cautiously, the Eskimos crept closer to the defenseless old male, while the dogs alternately dashed toward the bear's heels—and jumped out of range of his sweeping forepaw.

Powerless to move, Oo-lik stared helplessly at the bloody scene. He whimpered, and indicated to his mother that he wanted to run away and hide. But she detained him. The wounded animal had dropped to all fours, and was swaying from exhaustion and loss of blood. One of the dogs had underestimated the old bear's recuperative powers; the dog now lay on the snow, breathing his last.

While one of the hunters advanced directly toward the bear, the other approached from the left. Slowly, stiffly, the old monarch's head turned from one to the other. Then the Eskimo who advanced from the left peered along his smoke-stick. There was a reverberating roar. Oo-lik flinched, and tried to burrow underneath his mother. Then, trembling, he raised his head. The wounded bear toppled over and lay still; he had made his last stand.

The death of the old male, the yelping of the dogs, and the havoc wrought by the Eskimos' rifles—all these things made a deep impression on the cub. The cold-blooded efficiency of the hunters frightened his mother; and she felt nauseated at the death of a fellow creature. But she was glad, for the cub's sake, that he had seen it all with his own eyes; it would teach him to avoid hunters with long sticks, and dogs as tireless and blood-thirsty as a wolf-pack.

The hunters ranged their sled alongside the dead bear, tied ropes to its feet, and rolled their victim over onto his back, against the sled, ready for skinning. The sight of their knives broke the spell that had chained the old she-bear to the spot. With a sweep of her forepaw, she brushed the cub toward her rump, sat in the snow while he clambered onto her back, and set off at a fast walk toward the seacoast. Nor did she stop until she had put ten miles between herself and the hunters.

At the end of this journey Nanook was completely exhausted. She led the way down into a creek-bed covered with dwarf

willows and rimmed with steep cut-banks, and sat on the snow so that Oo-lik could dismount. Within a few minutes she was fast asleep. Her cub was left completely on his own. Oo-lik wondered how his mother could deliberately turn her back on all the interesting things in this glistening white world. For perhaps an hour he stood guard, rising often on his hind feet and scrutinizing the surroundings. Once an Arctic hare hopped out of a clump of willows, where he had been feeding, flopped his long ears backward and forward, twitched his nose in an attempt to get the cub's scent, then dashed up the hill to his den among the rocks. Oo-lik had never seen an Arctic hare, but he knew instinctively that this white rabbit was harmless; he curled up beside his mother.

But the cub could not sleep in the daytime.

Finally he rose, shook himself, and set out on a tour of the creek-bed. He could hear the water flowing under the ice; and a hundred feet down-stream, where the current was quite swift, he caught his first glimpse of running water. From that point he returned to the spot where the hare had climbed out of the creek-bed. What little feet the hare had! He sniffed along the trail.

He had followed the hare's tracks for several minutes when he came to footprints that looked exactly like his mother's and his own. It seemed that this Arctic world was filled with bears! He abandoned the hare's tracks to follow the new and much more exciting footprints, overlooking the fact that the trail bore to the northeast, and was therefore down-wind. His mother often had warned him against this dangerous practice. But he continued, his little black nose close to the snow.

STANDING at her slumbering mother's side, the restive Noatak watched the clumsy and unguarded approach of a polar-bear cub no larger than herself: Very well; since her mother insisted on sleeping, she would play with this bear. Perhaps he was lonely; perhaps his mother was asleep, too. Boldly disobeying the injunctions of her mother against associating with wandering polar-bear cubs, the exquisite little female ran back along the trail, crouched behind a snowdrift, and

waited for Oo-lik's clumsy approach. When he came within a few feet of her, she rose to her full height (about that of a cocker spaniel), and snarled a challenge.

The blundering Oo-lik, taken by surprise, whirled in his tracks, and was about to beat a precipitate retreat when instinct told him that she was harmless. In fact, she seemed friendly. She was standing in a small depression, and just beyond he could see her mother. He stepped nearer, until their noses touched. Apparently there was nothing to fear. Was not the scent of each exactly like that of their mothers?

Encouraged by the warmth of Noatak's welcome, Oo-lik scampered about her in a wide circle. It was the first occasion he had ever had to stretch his muscles. His little paws flung the snow into the air.

Noatak crouched playfully, and Oo-lik narrowed the circle until he came abreast of her. Then, much to the cub's surprise, she launched herself at him and bowled him over. For a moment they wrestled in the snow, like two young puppies. Both were breathing hard from their exertions; and Oo-lik realized, much to his chagrin, that the little female bear was as strong and agile as he was. It did not, therefore, add to his good opinion of himself when, without warning, she dealt him a resounding whack on the head.

This was the second time the cub had been chastised by one of the opposite sex. His mother had that privilege; she was his mother—and he had bitten her lower lip. But what right had this impudent little thing to box his ears? If Noatak had been his twin sister, the cub would have returned the blow, with interest. But one didn't fight strange little lady-bears. Crest-fallen, and at a loss to know what to do in the circumstances, the cub started back over the trail to his mother.

This was Noatak's first attempt at play. Realizing that she had hurt the strange little bear's pride, she dashed alongside, halted him for a moment, and licked with her little black tongue the spot where her unsheathed claws had almost drawn blood. Soon they were wrestling again in the most friendly fashion. When it became apparent to Oo-lik that he was not her superior in the catch-as-catch-can art, he cast about for some other method of dem-

onstrating the superior prowess of the male. As they stopped to catch their breath, he caught a glimpse of one of those white rodents that the snowy owl had seized in his talons a few days before. Instinctively he crouched flat in the snow. The lemming, unaware of danger, scurried along its runway. Noatak stood entranced.

This was the cub's first sight, at close range, of the lemming. He was not hungry, yet the instinct to kill surged up in him.

He pounced eagerly upon the plump and squealing rodent, and sank his slender white teeth into the back of its neck. Proudly he carried the limp creature over to Noatak, and laid it at her feet. It was plain that she considered him a great hunter.

But at that instant she heard the anxious cries of her mother. Oo-lik—the lemming—everything was forgotten; her mother would be angry. She raced back. Discreetly, the cub withdrew and followed the trail back to Nanook. She was still sleeping; he curled up beside her.

At daylight the mother bear got to her feet and tramped about to ease her stiffened joints. She lumbered over to the opening in the ice, and waded into the frigid water. Plunging her head into the stream, while her cub watched in wonderment, she sucked up the liquid in the same fashion that a horse drinks from a trough. Her first drink of water in months!

There was no food to be had, so Nanook returned to her bed in the snow. Oo-lik was restless; he wanted to return to the little lady-bear. His mother preferred to rest up for the trek to the coast, but the cub wrestled with her, sank his sharp teeth into the thick fur at her throat, clambered back and forth over her weary body, and chewed her ears. The mother bear paid no attention to these antics—so long as he did not strike a tender spot, such as her lips. She knew that at any moment the wolf-like dogs of the Eskimo hunters might pick up her trail. Out on the ice floes she and Oo-lik would be reasonably safe; there were numerous open-water lanes in which they could take refuge if pursued. These were the waterways of the toothsome seal. Besides, there was the task, essential to his future existence, of teaching Oo-lik to swim.

THEY reached the shores of the Arctic Ocean early in the evening, after the most strenuous day in the cub's existence. For his mother did not offer to carry him on her back. Side by side, the she-bear and her offspring stood at the top of the cut-bank, twelve or fifteen feet above the sloping, snow-covered beach. Beyond lay the smooth, land-fast ice. Here and there were tide-cracks, and occasionally an elongated snow-drift, running in the direction from which the last moderate gale had come. Parallel to the coast were interminable tracks made by the sleds of the Eskimos. These spelled danger to the old she-bear. Slowly, ponderously, she swung her long, narrow head from east to west, and back again, scrutinizing the coast-line in each direction. Her dark eyes were none too keen; they were not as sharp as those of a wolf. But she supplemented her poor eyesight with a highly-developed sense of smell.

The wind was from the east, and now Nanook could separate from the other odors of an Eskimo igloo—fish-racks, skins, meat caches, and dogs—the unmistakable odor of seal meat. She had not eaten in two days, and it was a great temptation to the mother; but she had her cub to consider. His life was too precious to risk in a foray on a meat cache. So she stood there, with the diminutive Oo-lik, looking northward to where a sand-spit and a jagged pressure ridge could be seen. It was the cub's first glimpse of the Great White Desert on which his ancestors for uncounted generations had made their home. Spotless, and stretching for a thousand miles toward the North Pole, it lay glinting in the dying rays of the sun. He sniffed the crisp air.

With the Eskimo igloo perhaps half a mile to the eastward, and an inhabited sand-spit three miles from the land, they were not yet safe from Eskimo hunters. Nor was it safe to travel in daylight. Abruptly, the old she-bear turned back toward the south, found a depression a quarter of a mile from the beach, and stretched out upon the snow, with Oo-lik beside her. Her travels were governed by the frailties of her cub; he was entirely dependent upon her for his food, his safety, and his comfort. Had she been alone, she would have waited until dark, then would have con-

tinued out onto the ice. She would have put a mile of open water between herself and the nearest Eskimo igloo before daylight. Five or six miles from the mainland, she would feel comparatively safe, for she knew that Eskimo hunters seldom ventured far from shore. They were afraid of being carried on the drifting pack to an unknown land which, according to their legends, lay far to the northward—and from which no Eskimo had ever been known to return.

It was still dark when Oo-lik awoke with a start, to find his mother nudging him. The youngster wanted to have his breakfast of milk, but his mother was impatient to get out onto the sea ice before Eskimo travelers were astir. Sleepily—but obediently—he followed in her footsteps. Descending the slope noiselessly on padded feet, the cream-white Nanook and her snow-white offspring swung far to the left of the sand-spit and at dawn arrived at the edge of the land-fast ice. She tried to pierce the misty veil that lay beyond, but the open water was hidden by fitful clouds of frost-smoke, where warm air from the surface of the sea came in contact with the cold breeze that swept over the ice.

This was the cub's first glimpse of any considerable body of water. He was awed by the smooth, glassy expanse. But his mother seemed as much at home in this strange element as she was on land. Without even a glance at her cub, she slid into the frigid water and swam, smoothly and with a powerful crawl stroke, toward the opposite ice-field. With her black-tipped nose raised slightly above the surface, and her broad pads and sinewy legs cleaving their way rhythmically through the icy sea, she proved that the polar bear is the most efficient swimmer of all the land-dwelling animals.

Oo-lik, abandoned at the water's edge, was unable to appreciate this demonstration. Never had he been separated from his mother by such a wide and impassable gulf. He did not trust this element, in which she seemed perfectly at home. Nevertheless, in desperation he walked down the slippery ramp until the strange, chilly medium reached almost to his little paunch. He sucked up a mouthful of water, like a

colt; it had an unpleasant taste. Then, thoroughly scared as the water swirled about his stubby legs, the cub backed out. He had never attempted to swim. Later in life, of course, he would be amphibious—the only member of the bear family equally at home in the water or on land. But at the tender age of six weeks, he was still strictly a land animal. Driven to distraction by the fear that his mother was going to desert him, the cub galloped back and forth along the edge of the land-fast ice, whimpering at every step. Impatiently, but with the realization that their immediate problem was to reach a place of safety, Nanook turned back. She clambered up the sloping shelf of ice, turned around, and indicated that the cub was to grasp her tail in his teeth. When he hesitated, she slid noiselessly into the water. The cub, overcoming for the moment his fear of the brackish depths, picked his way cautiously down to the water's edge, grasped his mother's tail between his sturdy teeth, and held on grimly. To him, this was an adventure fraught with considerable peril; to the old she-bear, it was merely a phase through which all of her cubs had passed.

Paddling instinctively, with only his black nose, short, rounded ears, and dark-brown eyes showing above the water, the cub held on. Puffing and spluttering, with a most unpleasant taste in his mouth, but quite proud of his courage and perseverance, he arrived at length at the opposite ice shelf. Before his mother could clamber onto the surface of the pack, the cub rose to his hind feet and licked her face, almost smothering her in his demonstration of affection. His mother was not going to leave him, after all!

Nanook may have appeared apathetic, but actually her love for the fuzzy little rascal was as deep as that of any other animal for its young. She would have fought against overwhelming odds; would have shed the last drop of her blood in his defense.

But, like other polar-bear mothers, she was not naturally demonstrative. Besides, her cub was being reared in a hard school; to coddle him now would lessen his chance of surviving in later years.

Kelson whirled like a surprised cougar, but the sight of the policeman's .45 pointed unwaveringly at his middle stopped him from going for his own gun.



MOUNTIES' LAST MISSION

By GEORGE E. McELROY

The toughest breed of troublemakers in the whole Northwest was the railroad construction workers. "Fight" was their middle name. And fresh from headquarters came three feudin' Mounties eager to show their stripe in the teeth of odds.

THE RHYTHMIC hoofbeats of a cantering horse roused Constable Terrance Banton, North West Mounted Police, from the lee side of a giant boulder where he'd been basking in the strong March sunlight. Getting to his feet, he waved a friendly greeting as Constable Skip Stoddard rode up the slope.



"Hi there, old timer!" he called out. "Any luck?"

Stoddard reined in his skittish bay cayuse and tipped back his winter issue cap. He was a small, wiry man just within the NWMP height requirements, and his waxed, black moustache was generally considered to be the largest and most luxuriant west of the Great Lakes.

"Maybe you'd call it luck, son," he replied, "but I'd put it down to good judgment and first rate scoutin'. When we left Macleod, I called the turn that we'd reach Bull Forks today. Well, Bull Forks is right on the other side o' that hill and from the sound o' things they got a civic reception committee warmin' up to greet

us. I could hear considerable shootin'."

"Shooting? Are you sure?"

"Am I sure?" Stoddard spat forcibly to emphasize his words. "Course I'm sure! Think I don't know shootin' when I hear it? I figger it has somethin' to do with all these railway strikes we've been hearing about. These minin' camp buckos are about the toughest breed o' trouble-makers in the whole North West. Most o' them'd fight a buzz saw and give it a couple o' turns start and the construction workers are the same breed. The Police detachments out on the western section o' this here railway have sure got their hands full."

"Constable Stoddard!"

Terry and Skip turned and saw Corporal Peter Weatherby, the third member of the party, striding towards them.

"I am in command here, Stoddard," snapped the Non Com. "You will make your report to me, not Constable Banton."

Weatherby was Terry's sworn enemy and there had been bad blood between the two from the moment he had been to the Corporal's squad of recruits at Regina six months before. The Non Com was an Englishman who had once held officer's rank in a line regiment of the British Army before emigrating to Canada and finding his way into the Mounted Police. He was a keen and efficient soldier and stood high in the opinion of his officers on the strength of his reputation as a martinet but was both feared and disliked by the men under him.

But it took more than a rebuke from Weatherby to fluster the hard-hided Stoddard.

"Bull Forks is just a few miles away, Corporal," he reported. "You can see it from the top o' that hill. I heard some shootin' comin' from there."

Weatherby glared at the two constables.

"In that case we'd better be on our way at once," he said. "Get the horses, Banton, and don't dawdle. Perhaps we can get there in time to be of some use if there's trouble."

"You're going to find life out here a great deal different from the depot, my lad. There'll be no time for playing the fool in Bull Forks," he added unnecessarily.

The remark rushed a hot flood of angry blood to Terry's cheeks but he made no reply. Wheeling abruptly, he walked over to where the horses were tethered.

TERRY'S record in the Mounted Police to date was a bad one and his crime sheet had as many entries on it as a spinster's diary. Most of the trouble could be traced to Weatherby and the feud which began on his first day in uniform when the Non Com had ordered him to take his hands out of his pockets.

"But I haven't got my hands in my pockets!" he'd protested.

That cost him ten dollars and a warning from the superintendent not to talk back to superiors.

A week later, Weatherby suggested that if Terry still nursed a grudge, he could settle it behind the riding school, that being the recognized proving ground for all fistic encounters at the Regina depot. The Corporal fancied himself as a boxer and it was his custom to challenge all unruly recruits at the earliest opportunity. Usually, his superior ring craft was the deciding factor in the bouts.

But Terry was also a boxer and had won the heavyweight title for his college two years in succession before joining the Mounted Police. After ten hard-fought rounds, the referee stopped the match and declared it a draw.

"You're handier with your fists than I'd reckoned, Banton," Weatherby said afterwards. "From now on, we'll settle our arguments in the orderly room."

Terry's satisfaction at this acknowledgment of his ability was somewhat lessened by the pain of his right eye, which he could no longer see out of, a split lip and an injured jaw which made eating and speaking a torture. But long after these reminders of the fight had healed, he remained a target for Weatherby's wrath and that factor, combined with his own violent and impulsive nature, served to blacken his record so that at the end of six months his documents showed little promise of his ever becoming an efficient policeman.

It was at that time that the order posting him as a reinforcement to the Bull Forks detachment on the western branch of the Canadian Pacific Railway, then under construction, was issued. Terry could scarcely believe his good luck. A posting anywhere meant freedom from all the petty restrictions and monotony of the depot and a chance to do some real police work. But a posting to Bull Forks had a particular significance to Constable Banton. It meant he would meet his father for the first time in eleven years.

Superintendent Ashley Banton was the officer in command of the Mounted Police Detachment at Bull Forks.

In the year, 1874, Terry had been just a kid attending school in Ottawa when his mother, the youngest child of a well-to-do and prominent businessman, had quarrelled with his father and went to live with her parents taking Terry with her. Ashley

Banton hot-headedly resigned his comfortable staff job at Militia Headquarters and applied for an appointment in the newly-formed North West Mounted Police. He'd marched west with the Force that same year and had not since returned.

Thus Terry was reared as a rich man's son without benefit of a father's restraining influence. His grandfather, although generally reckoned as a shrewd, severe and, sometimes, ruthless man in business, worshipped the boy and spared him nothing money and influence could obtain. Under such circumstances, it was not unusual that Terry's character and personality were affected.

The occasional letters he received from his father were the sole check on his behavior and attitude. These contained long and interesting accounts of life in the Canadian northwest, flavored with odd paragraphs of sound advice and were a powerful influence in Terry's development. They saved him from becoming completely spoiled and sharpened his imagination and hunger for adventure. What is more, they fired him with an overwhelming desire to see his father again.

Terry secretly decided to join the Mounted Police and, just after his twentieth birthday, made written application. Two months later, he reported for duty at Regina.

There he learned that being a popular hero at college and the leader of his social set in Ottawa was a good deal different from the life of a Mounted Police recruit. In an organization where it was not uncommon for sons of peers to be seen shovelling manure or grooming horses in the company of Montreal bank clerks, Ontario farm lads and Nova Scotia fishermen, Terry's grandfather's money and position counted for little. At the end of six months at Regina, it seemed as though he was farther than ever from realizing his ambition and seeing his father again.

Then, without warning, he was posted to Bull Forks. The only catch was that Weatherby was going too.

IT took the three policemen a little under an hour to cover the remaining miles to the tawdry collection of hastily-built, ramshackle buildings at the side of

the railway line which was the town of Bull Forks, construction centre on the western section of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

Bull Forks, in the spring of 1885, was considered to be the roughest, toughest hellspot north of the Canadian line. The recent completion of the Northern Pacific Railway in the United States had released a lawless and brutal stampede of foreign construction gangs, gamblers, whisky traders, horse thieves, gun men and scarlet women, who swarmed over the border to the CPR camps and these, apart from railway officials and a handful of Mounted Police, comprised the town's population.

Weatherby and his two men, upon entering the town, soon located the source of the noise they'd heard while approaching. An angry crowd of hundreds of laborers and hangers-on were thronging around the CPR office where two officials stood on the porch attempting to pacify them. One of the officials was fearfully grasping a Winchester while the other made a valiant attempt to make himself heard above the roar of the mob.

"Whar's our money?" one of the rioters near the platform was bellowing. "Thet's all we want tuh know! Whar's thuh money?"

"My friends," the man replied, "I can only say that I am expecting a pay train to arrive any day now! I promise you that you will all be paid!"

"That's what we've been hearin' fer weeks! C'mon, men! If these sharpers can't pay us, let's take it out'n thar hides!"

The cry for blood had the effect of a red hot poker shoved into a barrel of nitro glycerine. The mob surged towards the platform. At the back of the crowd, intermittent pistol and rifle shots added to the general din.

Weatherby turned to Stoddard.

"Ride to the post and report to the Superintendent," he ordered. "Banton and I will try and hold these rough necks until you can bring help!"

Spurring his horse, he plunged the animal headlong into the crowd and reached the platform just as the frightened officials were about to be dragged down into the clutches of the enraged construction hands. Terry, following close behind, leaped from the saddle and steered the CPR men into

the building as Weatherby drew his revolver and poked the muzzle within inches of the face of the nearest rioter.

"Get down!" he ordered sharply. Then, raising his voice to its maximum pitch, shouted, "The first man who attempts to climb up here will be shot!"

Weatherby had a sound understanding of mob psychology and was confident that by presenting a bold front and later playing upon their curiosity, he could keep them at bay for a time at least. Resentful and trouble-bent though the laborers might be, they would hear what he had to say before making another rush. Terry stood by on the platform, alert and thin-lipped watching Weatherby with grudging admiration.

The bluff worked. Although still beligerent and noisy, the shouting subsided a little and the men in the foreground fell back before the persuasion of the Corporal's .45. Weatherby replaced the weapon in its holster.

"Now, then," he called out. "Do you want to hear what I have to say?"

The roar had now died to a growling, dissenting murmur.

"We want our money!" yelled a harsh voice from the midst of the crowd. It was followed by an approving chorus.

"You'll get your money," promised Weatherby. "You'll get it just as soon as the railway company send out a train with a pay roll. The men in this shack you wanted to beat up are just as anxious for that to happen as you are. Now, take my advice. Go back to your camps and wait for the money to arrive."

A tall, dapper figure dressed in sombre black from stiff-brimmed Stetson to the ebony grips on the butt of his colt, elbowed his way through the crowd and confronted the Corporal.

"You spout a lot, Mountie," jeered the newcomer, "but that isn't getting these people their money!"

Weatherby reddened.

"Who the devil are you?"

"Kelson's the name. Matt Kelson. I'm sorry but I seem to have left my card case at home."

"Well Mister Matt Kelson, you don't look like a construction hand to me. You look like a small-time tinhorn trying to stir up mischief. If you're not employed

by the railway then this strike is none of your business. Now clear out!"

Kelson bellowed so all could hear.

"I'm making it my business, Mountie! These people are friends of mine and I think they're getting a raw deal. The CPR aren't paying them for their work and the Police do nothing but spoil their fun, confiscate their whisky and generally treat them like a bunch of Sunday School kids!"

This brief speech, spoken in even, semi-cultured tones was more effective than a dozen threats. The mob was behind Kelson to a man.

"Kelson, you're deliberately inciting a riot! Keep it up and I'll take you in!"

Kelson evidently did not think he was likely to be arrested in the face of such opposition. Sweeping off his Stetson, he pointed at Weatherby.

"Did you hear that?" he shouted to his backers. "Because I'm standing up for your rights this monkey-suit sidewinder threatens to arrest me!"

A roar of encouragement greeted his appeal.

"I warned you, Kelson!"

"Come and get me then, Red Coat!" spat out the trouble-maker.

Weatherby sprang from the saddle, accurately aiming his hundred and eighty-five pounds of crashing bulk so that both knees landed on Kelson's chest and flattened the man into the mud. Before either the mob leader or his followers could recover from their initial surprise, the Corporal flipped a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and secured his own left wrist to the right of his opponent. Then, jerking the dazed and bruised captive to his feet, he began dragging him towards the platform.

Terry pulled his gun just as the mob retaliated and Weatherby and his prisoner disappeared in a squirming mass of flailing fists and swinging boots. Loath to cause unnecessary bloodshed, he fired two shots of warning over the heads of the crowd giving two strikers the opportunity of mounting the platform and attacking from behind.

One circled his neck with a hard-muscled arm and jerked back his head while the other went for his gun hand. As he struggled futilely, the agony of a

bony knee driven with piston-like force into his groin, froze every muscle in his body. Staring with pain-glazed eyes, he tried to focus the struggling blur in front when a pickaxe handle crashed against the side of his skull. Helplessly, his legs buckled and he slumped against the wooden wall of the shack.

II

“OUR SOVEREIGN LORD, the Queen, charges and commands all persons being assembled immediately to disperse and peaceably depart to their habitations or to their lawful business, upon the pain of being guilty of an offense on conviction of which they may be sentenced to imprisonment for life. God save the Queen.”

Faint and hollow, like a voice in a dream, the words of the Riot Act registered upon Terry's numbed brain above the agonizing pounding of his head. With an intense concentration of effort, the Constable shook his head vigorously to clear it.

The mob had fallen back. Ringed about the CPR office were seven scarlet-coated horsemen as steady and impressive as though on parade. Constable Stoddard was bent over the crumpled form of Corporal Weatherby. Of Kelson, there was no sign, but the broken handcuffs attached to Weatherby's wrist were worth volumes of explanation.

The central figure on horseback was wearing the braided wedge cap and rank insignia of a Mounted Police superintendent. He was a man of about fifty years of age with grey hair, almost white at the sides of his head, and a precise military moustache, whose manner and bearing stamped him at once as a professional soldier of many years service.

There was no doubt of his identity. Despite years of separation, Terry recognized his father.

“That,” Superintendent Ashley Banton told the mob, referring to the Riot Act, “means exactly what it says. If you don't disperse at once, you will be liable to arrest and, possibly, life imprisonment. Is that clear?”

“Sergeant Baldwin, have your men arrest anyone who is loitering in this vicinity five minutes from now.”

The sergeant snapped his hand to his forehead.

“Sir!” he answered smartly.

Within the time limit set by the Superintendent, the mob had completely dispersed. Terry struggled unsteadily to his feet, put on his cap, which he found lying in the mud nearby, and approached his father.

“Constable Banton reporting, sir,” he said saluting.

This was the moment to which he'd looked forward.

There was no hint of friendliness or welcome to soften the frosty penetration of the officer's glance.

“Very good, Banton. You will ride back to the post with us if you think you can manage it. If not, you'll have to wait for the buckboard to be sent.”

“I think I can manage, sir.”

“Right. Sergeant Baldwin will parade you and the others before me later. I will hear the details of this incident then.”

Terry hesitated momentarily then, saluting once more in acknowledgment of the order, turned and slowly made his way to where Stoddard was helping Weatherby.

The excitement of the moment when he and Weatherby alone had faced the hopelessly uneven odds of hundreds of hostile strikers was gone. Then, the peril of their position had filled him with an unnatural feeling of exhilaration and recklessness which heavily overbalanced his sense of self-preservation and discretion.

Now that danger has passed, reaction from the ordeal gripped him and, combined with the after-effects of extreme physical effort and the pain of his bruises, it left him weak and nauseated.

The short, stern dismissal he'd been given by his father was the final straw. Even the kick he'd received in the groin or the blow from the pick-axe handle had not carried the sting of Superintendent Banton's impersonal phrasing.

What Terry had expected on his first encounter with his father in eleven years, he himself hardly knew but it certainly was not this. He'd pictured countless scenes on many occasions in the past, coloring them in his imagination with vivid hues of melodrama and fantasy. Now, he could scarcely convince himself that the

long-anticipated reunion had actually taken place.

Concern shadowed the face of Skip Stoddard as he caught sight of Terry.

"You all right, kid?"

Terry managed a grin.

"Still in one piece, Skip, but I feel just like I used to after one of those recruit rides at Regina.

"How is the Corporal?"

Weatherby, now on his feet brushing slush and mud from his clothing, darted a quick look at his junior.

"I'm well enough, Banton," he replied. "Have you reported to anyone yet?"

"Yes, we're to be paraded when we get to the post."

"Good enough. Get on your horse, Stoddard, and see if you can round up our mounts. We'll be moving shortly, I imagine."

SKIP returned a few moments later leading both saddle horses, which had not strayed far from the scene of the riot, with the pack animal trailing behind.

During the ride to the post, Skip and Terry rode side by side in the rear of Weatherby and the others.

"That was undoubtedly the most ram-bunctious welcoming committee I ever did see!" commented Stoddard wryly. "Sure am glad you didn't get hurt real bad by them hellions."

"If you hadn't brought up that squad when you did, Skip, I certainly would have been. Both Weatherby and myself can count ourselves lucky."

"You sure can," agreed the old timer. "When I got to the post, there wasn't a manjack in the place except the guard. All the others were out at points along the line where trouble had been expected. They hadn't figured on it starting right in town an' that's how come they didn't have men on hand to nip it in the bud.

"The Superintendent and his party were making a tour of the danger points when they heard the shootin' in the distance same as we did. They were on their way to investigate when I met them."

"I wondered about that," Terry said, "but then I've been wondering about a lot of things. What's the cause of all this trouble anyway?"

"Money and just plain orneriness. The

CPR have been havin' a tough time payin' the construction hands and there's a lot o' mean customers in these camps only too ready to stir up devilment. Leastwise, that's as close as I can figger it from what I've heard. I reckon old Soretail'll tell us more when we get to the post."

Terry's forehead wrinkled.

"Soretail?" he queried.

"Sure. Soretail. That's the O.C.'s nickname, Old Soretail Banton. They used to call him that because of the way he's always goin' around like a bear with a sore tail."

"You know him then?" exclaimed Terry with interest.

Stoddard chuckled.

"Know him! I sure do know him! Why he was my troop officer when we marched west in '74 and has had me up on the carpet more times'n you can count on the fingers o' both hands. Some o' the boys claimed a woman out east was the cause o' him being so hard to get along with but I don't rightly know. All I can say is, if he raised hell with her like he raises hell with us, it's no wonder she ditched him.

"Sure is funny, you and old Soretail havin' the same name. Maybe you're some sort o' relative!"

Terry's smile was forced and mechanical.

"Yes," he said reflectively, "I suppose I may be some sort o' relative!"

THE Bull Forks NWMP post was situated less than a mile from town on the south bank of the Bull River and consisted of an administration building, barracks and stables, all of log construction. The column clattered over a timber bridge spanning the flooded stream, passed an alert and businesslike sentry on guard in front of the administration building and halted in the stable yard. Baldwin, the detachment sergeant, rode forward to the superintendent for instructions and, when he had received them, relayed them to the men.

"After stables," he ordered, "you will go to your quarters and remain there in case we are called out again. No one will leave the post area without permission.

"The reinforcements will turn over their

horses and get cleaned up as quickly as possible for interview with the O. C.

"Is that clear? Right!

"Dismount! Reinforcements, fall out!"

Terry, accompanied by Weatherby and Stoddard, carried his personal kit across the stable yard to the building the Sergeant had indicated as their quarters. Inside, he found it to be a long, low-ceilinged room with wooden cots spaced along one side and a bare wooden table and bench in the center. Cots, table, bench and floor were scrubbed almost white, blankets and straw palliases were neatly rolled, and the men's kits were uniformly contained in barrack boxes at the end of each cot and upon wall shelves. A small room adjoining the main one revealed more scrubbed woodwork and a row of metal washbasins straight as though dressed with a yardstick and polished until each gleamed like a brass button.

At the sight, all of Terry's remaining illusions about the free and easy life on detachment disappeared completely.

Selecting one of the unused cots, he unrolled the blankets and palliasse, piled his kit on them and began to unpack. After bathing his cuts and bruises and generally sprucing up, he felt a great deal better and set about brushing and getting his uniform in shape. Weatherby and Stoddard did likewise and, half an hour later when they were putting the finishing touches on this task, Sergeant Baldwin entered the room.

Baldwin was a thick-set, florid-faced Non Com with a bull voice whose formula for success was simply, "When yer on parade; yer on parade and when yer off parade; yer off parade."

Sergeant Baldwin was now "on parade."

"Get ready to see the O. C. at once. Service jacket-boots'n britches'n spurs, pillbox'n belt without sidearms," he shouted in one long breath.

When the three newcomers were ready, Baldwin ran a practiced eye over them from head to toe, brushed some imaginary dust from the jackets, shoved his stubby fingers behind the buckles of the waistbelts to test their tightness and gave a snort of approval.

"Come on, then. Let's go."

III

THE LOG administration building contained an office for the detachment commander, an orderly room which also did duty as a guard room, three detention cells and Superintendent Banton's and Sergeant Baldwin's sleeping quarters. Terry, Skip and Weatherby waited outside the office while Baldwin went in to report. Suddenly, like a mighty jack-in-the box, the Sergeant's head reappeared in the doorway.

"Shun! Quick march! Left-right-left-right! Halt! Left turn! Corporal Weatherby, Constables Banton 'n Stoddard, sir!" he shouted with Gatling gun rapidity.

Superintendent Banton was seated at a blanket-covered table which served as a desk. Although his back was as straight as a hickory sapling, his face was drawn and lined and the gray hair on his head and in his moustache now seemed much more noticeable than when Terry had first seen him. Despite the icy brevity of his first meeting with this man, he could not repress the shiver of emotion which ran through his body.

"All right, Sergeant," the Superintendent said quietly. "You may go. I wish to speak to them informally."

"Sir!"

Baldwin's right hand cracked against his left as his open palm sped to his temple. Turning about, he marched from the room and closed the door behind him.

It was some moments before the officer spoke. When he did, an almost imperceptible smile broke on his lips but the iron eyes remained as stern and searching as ever. Standing up, he solemnly shook hands with each in turn.

"Now, stand easy," he ordered.

"The first thing I want to say to you men is that I am extremely pleased you have arrived. Keeping law and order in this country with the few Police available is a tremendous task at the best of times. Now this railway strike has begun, it has become almost an impossibility. I need more men and need them badly. Perhaps the incident in which you participated this afternoon has already given you an idea of what I am talking about.

"Corporal Weatherby, you had better

tell me everything that happened up to the point of our arrival."

Weatherby cleared his throat and, in clipped phrases, told how he and the two constables had become involved in the riot.

When he'd finished the Superintendent leaned back in his chair and thoughtfully rubbed knuckles on chin.

"Kelson, eh?" he murmured. "Well, this time we've got him! Up to now, he's operated under cover; always had others do his dirty work for him."

"It's too bad he got away from me, sir."

"Doesn't matter, Corporal. He won't get far. The important thing is we've now got definite charges against him. I quite understand that you couldn't possibly have prevented his escape."

"Now, I'm not going to waste a great deal of time explaining all the details of our trouble out here but I'll attempt to outline it in general terms. The rest you can pick up later."

"The Canadian Pacific Railway is, at present, up to its neck in financial difficulties and has not been able to pay the construction hands. Unless the government sees fit to advance money to the Company in the near future, it may be years before Canada gets a transcontinental railway."

"Since the strike began, the Mounted Police have done their best to guard Company property and, so far, have been successful but the job becomes more difficult every day. It is made much more so by a group of trouble makers who would like to discredit the Force and weaken our control. Kelson, I have reason to believe, is one of the ring leaders."

"That is all I have to say, for the present. When you leave here, Sergeant Baldwin will see to your immediate needs, instruct you in our routine and answer your questions."

"I wish to speak to Constable Banton privately now for a few moments. You others may go."

Weatherby and Stoddard saluted and left the office leaving Terry alone with his father.

The constable's pulse accelerated. His hands grew sweaty. Perhaps he thought, this is just his way of doing things. Of course, he couldn't recognize me in front of his men. It was only to be expected

that he would wait for an opportune moment to speak to me.

"Terrance," the Post Commander said stiffly, "this should be a happy occasion for both of us. I bitterly regret that it is not."

"Ever since I've been out here, I've missed you and your mother and, as time went on, I felt the loss more and more. When I first learned that you'd joined the Force, I was both pleased and proud. Even when the first reports of your playing the fool at Regina reached me, I remained tolerant and hoped that you would change once you had found your feet. But you didn't change. In another month, you would have been dismissed from the Force had I not persuaded my superiors to give you one last chance."

"Now listen to this and listen carefully. I was responsible for your being posted to Bull Fork and I did it because I intend to make you a Mounted Policeman. For the time being, there will be no father and son relationship between us. I am your commanding officer and you will find me a severe one. This is absolutely your last chance to make the grade and, although I won't ask you to do it for my sake, I do ask you to do it for your mother's."

"I hope I have made myself quite clear."

Terry's dry tongue touched uncomfortably again the roof of his mouth and he had to struggle to find his voice.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

"Very well, then, you may go to your quarters."

Once outside his father's office, the leaden ache of disappointment Terry felt changed to burning indignation. This was the moment to which he'd looked forward ever since his tenth birthday. This was the glorious reunion of father and son he'd joined the Mounted Police at fifty cents a day and suffered innumerable indignities and hardships to make possible when he could have stepped into a comfortable, well-paid position in his grandfather's firm in Ottawa.

Played the fool at Regina, had he! The smug conceit of the man.

"I intend to make a Mounted Police of you."

"Do it for your mother's sake!"

"I am your commanding officer!"

Damnation!

Terry's jaw jutted and his pace quickened as he vowed that he would show his father, and the whole Force, for that matter, whether or not he had the makings of a Mounted Policeman.

Bull Forks was the place to prove it.

IT was the practice of the Bull Forks NWMP post to have a constable on duty upon the arrival of supply trains and Sergeant Baldwin detailed Terry for the job a few days after the disheartening interview with Superintendent Banton. When the supplies and mail had been safely unloaded and the crowd at the station had dispersed, Terry, on his way back to the post, allowed his chestnut mare to ramble slowly along Bull Forks' main thoroughfare. It was the first time he'd been able to inspect the town at close range and it intrigued him greatly.

The long rows of tents, lean-to's, fake-fronted frame buildings and log shacks facing one another across the wide, deeply-mired street; the feverish bustling atmosphere of excitement; the crazy quilt pattern of humanity, buckskin clad plainsmen, teamsters, foreign pick-and-shovel men, engineers, Indians, half-breeds, and gaudy, bold-eyed women, all combined to fire the policeman's imagination and spell romance and adventure in large and glittering letters. But he could not fail to sense the strong undercurrent of vicious brutality, lawlessness, squalor, vice and ugliness which also prevailed.

The shrill, nerve-scraping scream of a woman pierced his reverie with all the suddenness of a Blackfoot huntsman's arrow. Terry caught up his reins and, scanning the side of the street from which the sound had come, quickly located its source. In a narrow alleyway between two, unpainted sheds, were two struggling figures, a man and a woman.

The man, a heavy brute, had the woman pressed up against the wall of one of the sheds, his left hand clutching her throat and his right knee jammed into the pit of her stomach. Deliberately, he drew back his free hand and drove it with bone-smashing cruelty against the woman's carmined lips. She screamed hideously.

Stark terror was staring out of the

drab's eyes as she watched the man draw back his fist for the third time. Her masses of crow black hair was streaming wildly down her back and over her eyes, her grease-spotted dress, the remnants of a satin evening gown, was torn down to the waist, and blood was trickling from the corners of her mouth.

A small knot of passers-by had gathered and were watching the fight with interest but none ventured to interfere. Not interfering, no matter what the circumstances, was one of the primary rules for survival at the Forks. All citizens who aspired to longevity observed it carefully.

The pressure of Terry's knees pivoted the mare and sent her at a canter while the sudden shout distracted the man in the mackinaw's attention before the third blow was delivered.

At the sight of the policeman, the man released his victim and, reeling back, drew a Colt's Peacemaker from inside his jacket. Aiming through a bloodshot haze of Rocky Mountain redevye, he emptied the weapon into the ground beneath the hooves of Terry's mare.

The animal checked its headlong rush, whinneyed with fear and reared, its forelegs flailing the empty air. Only by a microscopic margin did she fail to crash over backwards on top of her master. Terry controlled the reins with firm mastery, and patiently sought to calm his mount's frantic attempts to bolt and get as far away as possible from the belching six-gun.

The man, his weapon now empty, became convulsed with mirth as he watched the antics of the horse and rider.

"Better git a rockin' hoss, Mountie," he shouted. "Thet mare seems a mite skittish fer yuh!"

The audience of loiterers and idlers roared their appreciation while the beaten woman took advantage of the excitement to slip around the corner of the shack.

Terry exercised the same technique on the mare as he would have done on a horse refusing to take a jump. Lightly, his spurs touched the sweat-streaked flanks and he brought his leather-covered crop down on her rump with a resounding whack. The mare shot at the alleyway entrance like a missile from a catapult.

The man, confused by the sudden man-

oeuvre, crowded against the shed wall and raised his empty pistol in a futile, defensive gesture. The butt of Terry's weighted crop whistled downward and connected with the man's head. With a rasping gasp, he collapsed into the mud.

Slipping from the saddle, Terry handcuffed his unconscious prisoner and hoisted him across the mare's withers. Remounting quickly, he turned the animal's head and walked her slowly to the center of the roadway.

The sound of the shooting and ensuing excitement had spilled crowds of curious citizens from nearby saloons, swelling the original audience to more than a hundred.

"The Mountie arrested Jeff Cardan!"

Rapidly, the word spread among the throng. From both sides, the crowd closed in until the roadway was completely blocked. One of the men strode forward and grabbed Terry's bridle.

Terry raised his crop.

"Let's go!"

"We want Jeff Cardan!" shouted the man.

The crop guillotined down causing the man to jump back, bellowing with pain and nursing a cracked wrist.

Another man, armed with a Winchester, stood directly in Terry's path. Slowly he raised the sights of the weapon.

"One squeeze o' this trigger an' yore a dead 'un," he called out.

"One squeeze of that trigger and you'll hang!" replied Terry, his eyes boring into the other's.

The rifle sights did not waver. Slapping his legs against the mare's ribs, Terry headed her at a trot straight for the rifleman.

The Winchester vomited smoke and noise and the heavy bullet plowed into the constable's cap, whisking it from his head. Once more the mare reared, this time with disastrous results. Jeff Cardan's body slipped back against Terry, throwing him temporarily off balance, and that brief moment was all the crowd needed. Eager hands pulled him to the ground, where he became buried beneath a rain of blows and kicks.

Something hard and metallic connected with the point of his jaw and, for the second time, since his arrival in Bull Forks, he was knocked unconscious.

"BRING ANOTHER bowl of warm water, Maria. I'm going to bathe his face again and try to bring him around."

Terry stirred beneath the soothing touch of soft flannel on his face and blinked open his eyes. The first thing he saw was a mass of red hair glinting in lamp light and framing the face of a beautiful woman. His fingers nervously felt the edge of the patchwork quilt on the bed in which he was lying and he tried to sit up.

Gently, the woman pushed him back.

"You mustn't try to get up," she said quietly.

Terry gazed at her blankly.

"Where am I? Who are you?"

The woman ran the flannel lightly across his forehead.

"My name," she said, "is Rusty Saunders, if that means anything to you, and right now you are in my bed."

Terry shook his head and tried to sit up once more.

"I must get back to the post and report. My prisoner escaped."

"Yes. I know all about it. You were left lying in the road and I brought you here. You are in no condition to go anywhere this evening." Her voice was soft and almost a whisper but there was a hint of iron in it. "You must stay here until tomorrow. I will see that you get back then."

Terry opened his mouth to protest but she interrupted quickly.

"Besides, I have another reason for keeping you here."

"I must get back now," he persisted, throwing back the covers. "They will be looking for me."

He was surprised at his weakness as a fit of nausea and dizziness seized him.

"Listen," she said fiercely, "you'd like to know where Kelson is hiding, wouldn't you?"

"Kelson?" he repeated vaguely. Then he remembered. Kelson was the man who'd escaped in much the same manner as his own prisoner, Jeff Cardan, had escaped.

"You know where he is hiding?"

The woman smiled and fluffed the shimmering hair which had earned her the

nickname of Rusty. It was then he noticed that her eyes were as green as a cat's.

"I know a great deal more than that, Mr. Lawman," she replied. "Do you think I brought you here out of the goodness of my heart or because you are a Mounted Policeman? When you get to know me better, you'll find I have no heart and that I hate policeman! Your respected commanding officer has ordered me to be out of town by the end of the week because I am, as he terms it, 'an undesirable character.' Marie has been ordered to leave with me."

Terry glanced at the doorway which connected the two rooms of the small cabin and saw the drab girl he'd rescued from Jeff Cardan that afternoon.

"Why did you bring me here then?" he asked.

The cat-green eyes narrowed, and when she spoke she was no longer beautiful.

"Because I hate Matt Kelson and everyone connected with him! I'd like to see him arrested, or, better still—killed!"

"When the crowd left you lying in the road, it gave me an idea so Marie and I carried you here.

"What's your name?"

"Terry. Terry Banton."

"All right, Terry. I want to strike a bargain with you. I'll not only tell you where you can find Kelson and Cardan but also how you can prevent a twenty-thousand dollar pay roll robbery. All you have to do in return is promise that under no circumstances will you give away where you got the information. I remember one time in Montana where Matt had a man nailed by his tongue to a livery stable door for talking out of turn. I don't want that to happen to me."

Terry searched for some trace of deception in the woman's face but could find none.

"You didn't go to the post because you were afraid they would not agree to conceal your identity? Is that is?"

"Yes."

Still dazed and sick from his ordeal with the mob, Terry tried to guess the true motive for the woman's fantastic offer. How had she come by this information? What was her reason for hating Kelson so much? Why had she been

ordered to leave town by the Police? What could she possibly gain by telling him these things if they weren't true?

He couldn't even guess the answers.

"I can't agree to take any action until I've heard the whole story, Miss Saunders," he said cautiously. "However, I will promise to keep anything you tell me strictly to myself."

Rusty threw back her head and laughed.

"You sure play 'em close to your chest, don't you, kid? Any other Redcoat this side of Regina would be waving the bracelets at me by this time and threatening to take me in if I didn't tell all I knew, but you still think I'm trying to play you for a sucker."

Terry shrugged.

"I'm only trying to be fair," he said.

Without warning, she leaned forward and kissed him full on the lips.

"You've sold me, sweet," she said. "My God, look at him blush! Well, that's a good sign. You must be feeling better."

"Marie! Bring in a bottle of redeye and some cigarettes if there are any left. Then go to bed. Mr. Redcoat and I have some business to discuss."

THE sloe-eyed, half-breed girl padded in silently with the refreshments Rusty had requested and placed them on a nearby table. Rusty took one of the cigarettes and passed the box to Terry. He took one and studied it awkwardly before putting it in his mouth. He'd only smoked three or four in his life and had never seen a woman smoke one. He'd never seen a woman drink either; at least, nothing stronger than a little port or sherry and that only at Christmas or weddings.

Rusty poured five fingers of liquor in each of the tumblers Marie had brought.

"Don't tell me policemen aren't allowed to drink hooch on duty," she warned. "You're sick and this is just the thing for what ails you."

Terry nailed and sampled the fiery liquid. It had a kick like an outlaw cayuse but right away he could feel new strength flowing into his veins.

"Now for Kelson," he prompted, making an effort to sound matter-of-fact and businesslike.

Rusty inhaled and released the smoke slowly.

"All right, Terry," she said. "I'm going to let you have it both barrels. It has to be that way so you'll understand."

"This story really begins five years ago when I made a fool of myself by running off with Matt. I stuck with him ever since simply because I had no alternative other than going off with someone else like him. Every year I got to hate him more and more until last week he told me to clear out, that he never wanted to see me again. Just after that, I was told by the Police that they'd received a number of reports that proved me to be an undesirable and would have to leave the district. It wasn't hard to guess who was responsible for the reports."

"But the Police would want proof!" exclaimed Terry. "The reports would have to be substantiated!"

Rusty gave a dry chuckle.

"I'm not going to try and gild the lily, kid," she said. "Once the matter was to their attention, they didn't have any trouble finding proof."

"Why do you think Kelson chose this particular time to leave you?" he asked.

"Matt hates me as much as I hate him but I was too profitable for him up to now to lose. Now, he's got a big coup planned that he figures will be enough to set him up in the big time back East. He doesn't want a corn-fed has-been like me along."

"Anyway, it doesn't matter why he threw me over. The important thing is that he did and I hate his guts for it. That's why I'm telling you all this."

"What about the man I arrested this afternoon?" Terry asked. "How does he figure in all this?"

"Jeff Cardan is a member of the gang Matt built up after he came to Bull Forks. He's tough but he isn't important. The man who shot at you, though, is a different sort of hombre. He's just as smart as Kelson and meaner than a barrel of rattlesnakes. His name is Mike Todd and he's wanted in about five different states south of the line."

"Now, Mr. Lawman," she said, "this is the part that is important and I want your word of honor that you won't tell anyone where you got it. Kelson and Todd aren't the sort of hombres to forget and if they

ever find out I tipped their hand, my life won't be worth a torn shinplaster!"

"You already have my word," Terry replied. "I'll set myself on any lead you can give me. Now, what's all this about a robbery? How can there be a pay roll robbery if there are no pay rolls?"

"That's just what I'm going to tell you. There is going to be a pay roll and it's coming on a special train which will reach Bull Forks at five o'clock tomorrow evening. Probably because of the rioting and the chance of a hold-up, the arrival of the money is being kept a secret but Todd managed to buy the information somewhere and you can bet your poke it's reliable."

"They won't be able to get the money out to the camps the same night it gets here so it will be kept until the next day in the CPR main office under a Mounted Police guard. That's when Kelson and Todd plan to get it."

"The stick-up will take place after midnight tomorrow and Kelson is to take the money to his hide-out. The rest of the gang will simply double back on their tracks and go home so the Police won't have much of a trail to follow. Later, they're to get paid off by Kelson and he intends to get out of the country as soon as possible."

The constable stared at her in amazement.

"You mean they actually think they can get away with that?"

"Don't you?"

"No, I don't! They may get the money but they won't get far with it. It's impossible for wanted men to hide for long in a country as sparsely settled as this. Even if they go to the Indians, they run a strong risk of being reported by someone trying to curry favor with the Police. It's happened before, you know. Besides, now that we've got the telegraph, every detachment in the country will be warned, within a few hours of the robbery, to watch for them. Kelson won't have a chance in a thousand of getting over the border."

Rusty tossed her head impatiently.

"All right! Suppose they are caught eventually! They're still going to try and there'll be plenty of blood spilt before they are taken. Besides, if they get clear away

with the money and the work gangs find out, your precious Police will be too busy quelling riots to bother about Kelson and Todd and the others. You've got to stop this thing before it even starts!"

Terry was forced to agree.

"Where is this hideout of Kelson's?" he asked. "The obvious thing is for me to arrest him first, then go after Todd and the others before the time set for the robbery."

Rusty smiled.

"Now you're talking sense. Kelson is holed up in the mountains with an old trapper named McNab. McNab's cabin is on a creek called the Lazy Buck about ten miles down the river from town. The creek is the only one of any size on the north side of the Bull so it shouldn't be too hard to find. Still, the place is right off the beaten track and, as McNab is a sort of hermit and never comes near Bull Forks, the Police may not even know about him."

Terry finished the liquor in his glass and helped himself to another of Rusty's cigarettes.

"Right. Now tell me one thing more. How do you know all this?"

Rusty's eyes met his over the rim of her glass as she raised it to her lips. They seemed greener than ever.

"I told you before, the relationship between Matt and me was rather close until he kicked me out. Some of the things he let slip, and the rest, I simply made it my business to find out."

Terry swung his feet to the floor and ran his fingers through his hair. Although there was still a dull, persistent throbbing in the crown of his head, and his muscles were stiff and painful, he felt a great deal better. Reaching for his boots, he drew them on and began lacing them.

"I'm going back to the post."

Once more her manner changed. The line of her mouth softened and her eyes pleaded bewitchingly. Terry paused to look at her and thought to himself that she was one of the most beautiful women he'd ever seen. She was, by far, the most intriguing.

"Please stay," she whispered. "You're not well. You can go back in the morning."

He stood up and put on his jacket.

"Please! You must! I'm frightened!"

Rusty's arm slipped around his waist. His mouth was dangerously close to hers as the cabin door swung inward and Corporal Weatherby entered the room.

V

"**P**ERHAPS I should have knocked, Banton," said the Non Com coldly. "I hope you and the celebrated Miss Saunders will pardon the oversight."

Rusty was still clinging to Terry.

"The door was locked!" she gasped.

"A trifle I was able to overcome with the aid of my knife," replied Weatherby. "I took great pains to be quiet so as not to disturb your interesting little tete-a-tete."

"All right, Banton," he snapped. "Get ready. You're going back to the post and into the clink! This time you're washed up for keeps!"

Terry met his senior's contemptuous look without a quaver. It would be so easy to explain away this embarrassing situation by telling the unvarnished truth. Not only could he clear himself but also claim the credit for getting the goods on Kelson and his gang and preventing the planned robbery. It would pay off an old score to Weatherby by making him look a fool and and it would also establish his own reputation for all time.

It would be so easy—except for the promise he had made to Rusty.

Weatherby stalked across the floor and stood directly in front of Terry.

"You rotten, sneaking whelp!" he snarled. "Call yourself a Policeman and then be caught holed up with a dirty trollop like Rusty Saunders!"

Terry's fist pistoned out and crashed with a grinding crunch in the center of his tormentor's sneering face. The Corporal's head twisted and, as he fell, his temple struck the corner of the table. Senseless, he folded into an ungainly heap upon the floor.

The constable stared, first at his knotted fist and then at Weatherby. Suddenly it dawned upon him what he had done.

This was the end. He could not hope to beat a charge of striking a superior even if he explained away the damning circumstances of his being found in

Rusty's cabin. This could only have one result; a dishonorable discharge from the Force.

"But," Terry murmured to himself, "that will have to come after I've settled my account with Kelson and his pugs."

Snatching his belt and holster from the back of the chair where Rusty had hung them, he wheeled and found himself facing Skip Stoddard. Skip gestured with the revolver he held levelled at Terry's midriff.

"Hold it, son," he said with his characteristic drawl, "I reckon you've made enough of a damn fool of yourself for one night. I'm takin' you back to the post!"

In one of the three dingy cells in the administration building, Terry sat on the edge of the wooden cot hinged to the wall and buried his face in his hands. It had been no use; he couldn't persuade them to listen.

Tomorrow, he would be formally marched into the orderly room by Sergeant Baldwin to be tried by his own father on charges of disorderly conduct and gross neglect of duty. Then he would be able to explain how he had come to be found in Rusty Saunders' cabin but by that time it would be too late to prevent the payroll robbery.

He'd been a fool to strike Weatherby the night before in Rusty's, but he could not bring himself to be sorry. The only thing he was sorry for was the wretched luck which had stalked him ever since he'd joined the Force. But now that the damage was done and the very culminating point of disaster reached, nothing seemed important any longer. Being dishonorably discharged simply meant that he'd be free to return East and take a position with his grandfather's firm. With money and position behind him, the stigma would mean little.

Even the robbery didn't seem to matter now. He'd warned his gaolers that it was scheduled for that evening but as he'd not been able to reveal the source of his information because of his promise to Rusty, Sergeant Baldwin had chosen to ignore the story.

Now, it was too late for anything to be done. The time was already past midnight and it might even be that the robbery had already occurred.

Terry lay down on the hard cot, pulled up the coarse, heavy issue blankets and stared into the darkness. With logic he could free himself of all responsibility but he could not smother his conscience entirely. Sleep refused to come.

"M'sieu!"

The whisper was so low it was hardly audible. Terry lay still and listened, thinking his nerves were playing him tricks.

"M'sieu," it came again. "M'sieu, de window."

Terry got up and quickly crossed to the small, barred window.

"Rustee, she sen' me here," said the voice. "She sen' you dese an' say you mus' come queek."

Terry accepted the two objects thrust between the bars and found them to be a crowbar and a Colt. Peering at the dusky face on the outside, he recognized Marie, the half-breed girl. Before he could collect his thoughts enough to answer, she had disappeared.

A gun and a crow bar!

IF he could force the cell window and escape there might still be time to prevent the robbery. Even if too late, he would still have a chance of recovering the money at the Lazy Buck hideout. Kelson and Cardan would be here alone with McNab. Todd and the others would have to stay in Bull Forks long enough to establish their alibis before proceeding to collect their shares of the loot.

With the tools for escape in his hands and hope of preventing the robbery still within reach, Terry at once forgot his attitude of defeat of just a short time before. Slipping the gun into his pocket, he put on his boots and jacket and began to examine the cell window for possible flaws. The bars were set in a metal frame which was firmly secured in the building's log wall.

Under ordinary circumstances, escape would be out of the question but the window was not constructed to resist attacks on it with a heavy steel crowbar.

It took little more than an hour to pry the iron window frame from its fastenings and lower it quietly to the floor. Once, during the process, one of the constables on duty in the orderly room had come

down the cell corridor on a brief inspection tour but Terry had quickly climbed under the blankets on the cot and when the constable glanced in the cell, successfully feigned untroubled sleep.

With the coast clear and the window free of bars, he pulled himself up, squeezed through the narrow opening and dropped to the ground outside. Keeping well into the shadows, he ran down to the stables, undid the fire-knot which held his mare in her stall, threw the saddle on her back and lifted a bridle from the rack as he led her out the door.

It was not until he'd walked the animal a hundred yards or more from the post that he paused to saddle her properly and slip on the bridle. Mounting silently, he turned her head towards the river and cautiously crossed a stretch of crackling frozen turf. Once over the bridge, he urged the mare into a brisk canter.

Terry was still a good quarter of a mile from the CPR office when the shooting started. Staccato and clear on the night air, revolver shots sounded in rapid succession followed by a chilling silence. Bending low over the mare's neck, he touched his heels to her flanks and raced her down Bull Forks' deserted main street.

The street in front of the Company's office was as empty as the rest of the town by the time he arrived except for the body of a man lying spread-eagled on the frozen ground. Sliding from the saddle, the constable turned the body over and saw that it was Jeff Cardan.

Racing up the office steps and through the open door, Terry nearly tripped over another figure on the floor by the threshold. Rays from the guttering oil lamp still burning in the office made the uniform-clad form of Skip Stoddard easily recognizable. The veteran policeman was propped against the wall with a revolver limply grasped in his right hand and a dark, ugly blot on the front of his tunic.

"Hello, son," he murmured weakly. "Where'd you spring from? Thought you was safe in cold storage back at the post."

"Skip!" Terry explained. "You were the guard tonight."

"That's right son. Couple o' fellahs with masks busted in here a while back an' started throwin' lead. I caught a packet

before I even got my gun out but they didn't get away scott free. I plugged one of 'em just as he was gettin' out the door.

"I think they killed both CPR men. They were asleep when the ruckus started and them coyotes let 'em have it when they were gettin' outa bed."

"Don't talk, Skip. Just rest easy."

"Gotta talk!" gasped Stoddard. "I'm done for and I know it. Gotta get somethin' off my chest. Terry, I just want you to know that bringin' you in last night was the dirtiest job I ever had to do in my life."

"Skip, I understand."

"Don't waste time with me here now, son. Get after the hellions that got the pay roll. If you catch 'em maybe it will square things for all the hell you've been raisin' since we hit this neck o' the woods."

A shudder ran through Stoddard's body and his head fell forward. When Terry raised it and peered into the man's face, he was dead.

Terry helped himself to a heavy sheepskin coat hanging in the office, slipped his gun into the side pocket and once more mounted the mare. There was but one course of action open; to reach the hideout on the Lazy Buck as quickly as possible.

THERE was no beaten trail along the riverbank and, in the darkness, Terry found he could make but little progress on horseback. Sitting limply in the saddle, he rode with a loose rein allowing the mare to pick her own way over the rough ground.

By the time the sun had poked its bright yellow rim over the mountains in the distance behind him, he was chilled to the marrow and as stiff as a packing house carcass. After another hour in the saddle, he finally came upon a creek which fitted the Lazy Buck's description.

In the dry season, the Lazy Buck was little more than a trickle but now it was a roaring young giant, swollen from the melting snows on the mountain slopes. Overflowing the wooded banks, it thundered into its swirling parent, the Bull River.

Terry dismounted and carried out a brief reconnaissance. Within a few minutes, he'd located a rough trail running

through the pine thicket beside the creek and closer examination brought to light hoof prints in the half-thawed ground.

"Look like this is the Lazy Buck, all right, old girl," he remarked to the mare. "We'd better be on our toes from now on."

A few miles further along the stream, he halted and sniffed the air. Smoke! There seemed to be no doubt but that he was on the right track. Cautiously, he eased the mare along the trail and found himself in a small clearing.

"Grab high, Mister! Reach!"

Terry cursed under his breath as he raised his hands. Once again his characteristic bad luck had caught up with him.

The voice behind him spoke again.

"Don't git any bright idees like spurrin' thet hoss or goin' fer a gun. I got a Sharps pinte at yer back plumb center. Now, reach down real slow, take yer gun out an' drop it. Don't turn 'round."

Terry followed instructions.

"That's fine, Mister. Now ride away from the gun. Don't want yuh jumpin' on my neck when I go tuh pick it up."

"Don't take any chances, do you?" commented Terry.

"Fellers who take chances don't live long in this country, Mister. Git down from the hoss."

Terry obeyed and got his first glimpse of his captor. He was a small, bewhiskered individual dressed in filthy buckskin and carrying an enormous buffalo gun.

"That's fine, son. Let the hoss go an' jest mosy up through the clearin'. Camp's jest over the rise.

"Reckon it's a good thing I come down here else yuh might hev Injuned up on us. Got a few traps along the creek. Git the odd mink thar."

He chuckled heartily.

"Shore got a big un this mornin'!"

The cabin was the usual log structure banked with earth and calked with moss and mud. The chimney was of stone with a thin trickle of wood smoke rising out of it and curling lazily upward.

"Walk right in, Mister," invited the trapper, McNab. "Reckon Matt'll be right glad to see yuh."

Kelson was hunched over the fireplace warming his hands when Terry entered.

The sight of the policeman sent him dragging for the ebony handled gun at his hip. Then he noticed McNab with the ready Sharps.

"What the hell's this?" he demanded savagely.

The trapper leaned his rifle against the wall and hitched his belt.

"Visitor to see yuh, Matt. Found him down by the creek. Mebbe he figgered yuh wuz lonesome!"

Kelson was not amused.

"Stow that chatter, you old fool, and get his gun," he rapped.

McNab pulled the revolver he'd taken from Terry out of his belt and spun it expertly on his forefinger.

"Got it, Matt."

"Get some rope, then, and tie his hands behind his back."

McNab took a length of twine from a wall shelf and glided behind Terry with a swift, catlike movement. When the job was finished, Kelson stepped back and put his gun in its holster.

"How did you find this place, Red Coat?"

VI

TERRY STOOD, feet apart, and stared defiantly.

With scalding force, Kelson's open palm slammed against the side of his face.

"Talk!"

The policeman shook his head as though to clear it but made no reply.

Kelson's upper lip curled from his teeth.

Slowly and deliberately, he clenched his fist and sent it crashing against his captive's mouth causing Terry to stagger over a pile of firewood and fall heavily. The hold-up man followed the blow with a series of short, vicious kicks.

"When I ask something," he raged, "I want an answer! How did you find this place?"

Terry tried to raise himself from the floor but fell back with a moan of pain. McNab stepped forward and caught Kelson by the arm.

"How kin he talk when yer kickin' hell outa him?"

"You keep out of this!" he snarled, shaking off the trapper's hand. "Get

some grub ready I've got to clear out of here before more of these damned Red Coats arrive. This place isn't safe any more.

"I'll attend to you later, Mountie, and, before I leave, you're going into the Lazy Buck with a lead ballast. By the time your pards find you, if they do, I'll be over the line."

McNab threw some kindling on the fire and placed a blackened pot of beans and another of coffee over the blaze.

"Ain'tcha gonna wait fer Todd an' t'others?" he asked.

Kelson walked to the far end of the cabin and, kneeling down, pried up two loose timbers from the floor, revealing a dark cavity. From the depths of the cavity, he lifted a metal cash box.

"And get myself strung up by the neck by these damned Red Coats! Todd and his boys won't be here, until this afternoon and that's too late. I'm going to take the money now and get out. Todd can go to hell!"

"How about me, Matt?"

"You can take a prospecting trip into the hills for a few weeks then come back as if nothing had happened. They can't pin anything on you."

The old man fingered his whiskers as he considered this.

"In that case, I'll take my split right now. I reckon it wouldn't strain yer conscience none tuh double cross me as well as t'others. I want whut's comin' to me."

Kelson stared contemptuously.

"Don't worry, McNab," he said meaningly, "you'll get what's coming to you!"

Neither noticed the scarlet coated figure who quietly stepped into the room at their backs.

"Both of you are going to get what's coming to you," said Corporal Peter Weatherby. "Put your hands up—smartly!"

Kelson whirled like a surprised cougar but the sight of the policeman's .45 pointed unwaveringly at his middle stopped him from going for his own gun.

"Up, I said!" snapped the Corporal.

Reluctantly, hate and frustration burning in his eyes, Kelson raised his hands.

"You damned old goat!" he swore at McNab, "I told you more Red Coats might show up!"

"Be quiet!" ordered Weatherby. "Banton! Are you all right?"

Terry struggled painfully to his knees, then to his feet.

"My hands are tied."

"Come over here then. My God, if ever a man needed a wet nurse, you do!"

Picking a knife from the table, the Non Com cut the cords with a few deft movements.

"Get their guns," he ordered, "then put the bracelets on. You'll find a couple of pairs in my pocket."

Terry obeyed but not without sensing acutely the ironic twist his failure had taken. The ugly death in the icy waters of the Lazy Buck, Kelson and McNab had had in store for him seemed almost preferable to owing his life to Weatherby.

Weatherby put away his revolver.

"I've got a number of things to settle up with you, Banton," he said, "but right now, the important thing is getting these two and the money back to the post. Keep an eye on them while I get the horses."

Terry pocketed Kelson's gun but kept his own, which he'd recovered from McNab, ready in his hand.

"Right," he said curtly, and fell to wondering how Weatherby had discovered the hideout so quickly and why he'd come alone to make the arrests.

The Corporal had been gone less than a minute when the sharp blast of a rifle shattered Terry's meditation. He reached the door in time to see his superior lurch and fall. A puff of black powder smoke in the heavy brush down by the creek betrayed the hiding place of the rifleman.

In almost the same instant, Terry was conscious of a noise behind and half turned just as Kelson hurtled into him. McNab's boot connected with his wrist and sent the revolver spinning from his grasp. As he scrambled to get up, Kelson's long legs shot out and caught his head in a merciless scissors-hold while the trapper slammed down heavily with both knees on the small of his back.

Desperately, Terry squirmed under the weight of his burden and tried to suck air back into his deflated lungs. Reaching up, he caught hold of one of Kelson's feet by the heel and toe and twisted. With a yelp of pain, the man loosed his hold, rolled on his back and drove his heel

against the policeman's ear. McNab, handcuffed as he was, continued to use his knees to advantage and clung to Terry as though riding a mule bareback.

Again Kelson kicked, but this time Terry was prepared and regained his heel and toe hold. Drawing up one leg beneath his body, he managed to struggle up on one knee. Suddenly, he released Kelson's foot and hurled himself back on top of the surprised McNab. Once free of the bear trap clutch of the trapper's knees, he dived for his fallen gun.

"Hold it, Mister!"

The speaker gestured threateningly with the rifle he carried.

"Git yore hands up!"

MIKE TODD was the man who'd shot Weatherby. During the struggle, he'd reached the cabin unnoticed. Terry stood up and glared at the big man with the squinting eyes, straight, thin mouth and square jaw who looked more like a cattleman than a construction worker. It was the second time he'd faced the business end of that particular Winchester.

"You got here in time, Mike," Kelson said affably. "These Red Coats had us cold."

Todd glanced at him with ill-concealed contempt.

"So I see. You wuz alus a great schemer, Matt, but plumb useless when tuh scrappin' starts."

Four riders appeared from the direction of the creek and approached the cabin.

"Smoky," Todd called to one of them without taking his eyes off Terry, "have somebody guard the trail in case more visitors show up and I want the other Red Coat brought here. I might want to ask him some questions if he ain't dead."

The man named Smoky quickly carried out the instructions. Corporal Weatherby was dragged into the cabin. The rifle shot had smashed his hip and the combination of pain and shock had rendered him half unconscious.

Todd ushered Terry, Kelson and McNab back into the cabin.

"You too, Smoky," he ordered. "I want you to sorta keep an eye on things while I talk business with Matt. The rest can wait outside."

Kelson tugged at his handcuffs impatiently.

"Can't you get these damn things off me, Mike? The wounded Mountie has the key."

Todd looked from Kelson to the cash box on the floor and then back to Kelson again. Slowly, he shook his head and drawled, "Somehow, I figger yuh better stay tuh way yuh are, Matt."

A glint of fear flickered in Kelson's eyes.

"You mean you're not going to let me go?"

"Yep."

"What's the idea? How about the deal we made? How about my share of the money?"

Todd built a cigarette and lit it before answering.

"Yuh know, Matt," he purred, "fer a hombre with a rep fer bein' smart like you got, it takes yuh a long time to catch on."

Kelson's face blanched an unhealthy grey and he swallowed nervously.

"What are you going to do?"

Todd hitched at his belt and took a pace forward. The corners of the thin, straight line of his lips twisted in triumph and when he spoke, the words tumbled forth as though they'd been dammed back for a long time.

"I'll tell yuh what I'm gonna do, Matt, and, what's more, it'll give me great pleasure tuh do it! I'm gonna fill that yaller belly o' yourn plumb full o' .45 slugs an dump yuh in the Lazy Buck!"

"Back in Bull Forks before the Red Coats were on yer trail, yuh were a pretty big man. Yuh had tuh money and power to git what yuh wanted. Smoky an' me an' the rest o' the boys took all the risks while you sat back an' took most o' the profits. Then when things got hot yuh decided to skip over the border with a full poke. Wal, me an' the boys decided different.

"Course we didn't expect to find these Red Coats here but I don't reckon they change the hand much. I got no more love fer 'em than I have fer you an' it won't cause me no loss o' sleep after all o' yuh are buzzard bait!"

Kelson's face contorted with stark terror.

"No! No! Todd! You can't do this to

me! Didn't I always play square with you and the boys? Didn't I?"

Todd made no reply.

"You can keep the money, Mike! Just let me go! I'll clear out for good! You don't need to kill me!"

The cattleman's hand flashed out and slapped across the other's mouth.

"Shut up!"

Panic stricken, Kelson made a futile rush at his tormentor. Todd's hand flashed beneath his coat and reappeared holding a Frontier Colt. The gun blasted when Kelson's chest was a scant twelve inches away from its muzzle. Todd leapt clear and allowed the body to drop to the floor. Raising the weapon again, he fired three more shots into the writhing form.

The cattleman ejected the empty shells and shoved new ones into the cylinder.

"Reckon that jest about squares us, Matt," he said callously.

AT the sound of the shooting, the men waiting outside crowded the cabin doorway. Todd beckoned to them.

"Take our friend, Mike, here an' dump him in the creek," he ordered. "Make sure he gets well out into the current!"

Terry tensed as he watched the corpse's removal. Now that Kelson had been dealt with, he knew that he, Weatherby and McNab would be next but he could see no opportunity to escape. The man called Smoky seemed to sense what was running through the policeman's mind and watched more intently than ever.

"How about these three, Boss?"

Todd glanced quickly about the cabin.

"Hold it just a second Smoky. I think I've got an idea. If these Red Coats are found filled full o' lead, it's gonna make things too uncomfortable 'round here. I been thinkin' it might be better to give their lawmen friends a little riddle to puzzle out."

"How d'yuh mean, riddle?"

Todd chuckled.

"Seems to me there ought to be a can o' coal oil 'round somewhere. We'll lock 'em up an' set fire to the place. Make it all look accidental like!"

Crossing the room, he peered into the depths of McNab's storeroom, a small pantry built on the side of the cabin. He

stepped inside and came out again carrying a large can with a wire handle.

"This is the stuff," he called to Smoky and began splashing the coal oil over the floor and against the walls. "This old shack is as dry as tinder. It'll go up in no time.

"Watch that Mountie real close; he might try to make a break fer it. I'll touch off the fire an' clear out with the cash. You come out last an' don't hesitate to shoot if yuh have to."

Smoky hefted the Winchester.

"Okay, boss. All set."

Todd scraped a match on his boot sole, tossed it on the oil-soaked floor and grinned as he watched the yellow flames shoot up and catch on to the dry timbers. In a matter of seconds, the fire was beyond all control. Snatching up the cash box, he ran for the door, Smoky following and covering his retreat.

In sheer desperation, Terry hurled himself at the opening, reaching it just as the heavy door slammed shut in his face. On the other side, he could hear Todd bellowing for his man to jam logs against it.

Already half the cabin was blazing with roaring intensity. Terry stepped back searching for a way to escape but found none. The small window in the opposite wall was too small for a man to pass through and there was nothing in the room which could be used to batter down the door. Inevitably, he turned his eyes upon the two men with whom he shared this fate.

Weatherby was still lying where Todd's men had dropped him but McNab was standing watching the fire with inhuman calmness.

"Son," he said suddenly, turning towards Terry, "we've got one chance in a million o' gittin' outa this barbeque. Want to take it?"

Terry stared as he tried to force his brain to function normally. He had no will to do anything but agree.

"Then git these consarned things off'n my wrists!" demanded the old man. "I used to do a mite o' prospectin' in these hills an' I've got a few sticks o' dynamite cached away where Kelson had the money hid."

"What good will that do?" Terry asked.

"What good'll it do! It'll blast our way

outa this here hot box! Thet's what it'll do! Git these bracelets off'n me!"

Although Terry had little faith in the old man's scheme, he unlocked the handcuffs and set McNab free.

"Turn that table on its side agin' the wall as a kinda shield," shouted the trapper. "The further from the door the better. Then git the Corp behind it while I git the dynamite."

Terry dragged Weatherby across to the pantry, where Todd had discovered the coal oil, and put him inside. Then, with considerable effort, he up-ended the massive timber table and manoeuvred it in front of the pantry.

Meanwhile, McNab had dived like a gopher into the floor cache, re-appearing with several dynamite sticks, detonators and a roll of safety fuse. Quickly and methodically, he cut the fuse into short lengths and rigged four crude demolition sets. By the time he'd finished, the heat had become almost unbearable and burning fragments were showering from the roof.

"Here, son!" he shouted, thrusting three of the sets into Terry's hands, "hold on to these! Gotta fix this un in the door good an' proper else we'll git a helluva lot o' blast an' no hole!"

"Let me do it," said Terry.

"Nope! I'm an expert!"

VII

TERRY watched the old man fight his way through the blistering barrier of heat and smoke towards the cabin door around which the hungry flames were already flickering. Blindly, with an arm thrown before his face, McNab paused within three feet of the door then turned and scrambled back to the scanty protection the table offered.

"Couldn't make it, son!" he gasped feebly. "Couldn't make it!"

Terry looked despairingly from the exhausted trapper to the door. To reach it and place the explosive properly was, by now, out of the question.

"Give it to me," he said with sudden determination.

"Can't be done," protested McNab.

"No, but I can do something else. I can blow out some of the fire around that

door! Stick your fingers in your ears!"

Holding a match to the fuse until the powder ignited, he tossed the dynamite across the room and ducked behind the table top. Seconds later, the building rocked with a deafening blast that brought down one of the roof timbers and a shower of sparks.

But, to a certain extent, the explosion accomplished its purpose. Without waiting for the flames to regain the upper hand, Terry raced for the door. Although he held his breath, the acrid smoke fumes seared his lungs and the heat seemed to be peeling every inch of skin from his body. Frenziedly, he jammed the dynamite behind the bar on the door, lit the fuse and raced for safety.

The second explosion seemed to tear the earth itself from its orbit but when he peered over the table top, he caught a glimpse of daylight through the clouds of billowing smoke. It took every atom of self control he could muster to keep from rushing for the opening and escaping his present unbearable torture.

McNab, overcome at last by the severity of his ordeal, was unconscious but Weatherby was not. Though numbed, his senses were functioning and he watched the efforts of his junior with helpless resignation.

Terry looked from one to the other. The trapper was a criminal who, if it hadn't been for Weatherby's arrival, might have been a party to murder. But if it hadn't been for McNab and his dynamite there would have been no escape from burning to death.

Weatherby was a sworn enemy and, wounded and helpless as he was, rescuing him under present conditions was a next to impossible. Should he attempt it and fail, there would be no one to testify against Todd and his outlaws. They might never be caught.

There was only one logical answer—save himself.

Terry placed his hands under Corporal Weatherby's arm pits and began the superhuman task of moving him to the doorway and safety. From that moment until he fell exhausted and retching on the blessed cool earth outside, his mind was blank.

He was only half conscious when

he heard the angry thunder of the remaining dynamite sticks exploding.

McNab was finished.

A few minutes' rest and the delicious relief of fresh air quickly restored Terry. The pain of his burns was secondary to his thankfulness at being clear of the cabin's flaming hell. Struggling to a sitting position, he stared at the scorched, smoke-blackened face of the man whose life he'd saved.

Weatherby opened his eyes and his lips trembled.

"Well done, Banton," he whispered.

"Are you all right?"

"Right enough," came the reply through tightly clenched teeth.

Terry couldn't stifle the admiration he felt for this man.

In strained tones, the Corporal spoke again.

"Listen, Banton. I've something to say. Perhaps you've been wondering how I found this place so soon?"

"Yes," replied Terry guardedly, "I was."

"My apologies for misjudging you the other evening. Rusty Saunders came to the post shortly after the robbery and told the whole story. As there was only myself and Jim, the cook, on hand, I had to come after you alone. The rest of the detachment were out trying to pick up the trail of the hold-up men.

"As soon as some of them get back, Jim will send them after us. Now that we know Todd is the ring-leader and can identify the others, catching them and recovering the pay roll will be easy."

Weatherby paused to fight the shriveling pain waves from his wound, then continued.

"As for you, Banton, you're no longer under arrest. I made out the charge against you the other evening and I'm withdrawing it right now. I was wrong about you from the beginning and now I know, I don't mind admitting it. Nothing will be said about your breaking arrest. That was done under circumstances that could not possibly have been foreseen when the NWMP Rules & Regulations were drafted. The best thing we can do is forget it happened. One thing we all learn

in this game is, it takes more than a rule book to enforce discipline and it takes more than a red coat to make a policeman!"

"Thanks, Corporal," Terry said simply. "It could be we were both wrong about each other.

Weatherby forced a weak grin and lifted his right hand.

"Suppose we shake on that, Banton, and, while we're at it, we'll shake on the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Word came through on the telegraph last night that the government had voted five million dollars to the Company to finish the job. That puts an end to the strike trouble and means that Canada gets a transcontinental railway after all.

"I'm glad you proved you had the goods. It's going to make a lot of difference to your father."

Terry struggled with the lump in his throat as he groped for words.

"You know who my father is?" he exclaimed.

"I've known all along," Weatherby told him. "I found out about that from your papers at Regina when you first joined and I guess that's why I always felt bitter towards you. You were an officer's son and too damned cocky for my liking. I swore to take it out of you. What's more, I didn't think you had what it takes to be a policeman. Now I can see that I was wrong and I want you to know I don't feel that way just because you saved my life.

"There's just one other thing I want to mention—that punch you handed out to me at Rusty Saunders' place the other night."

Terry frowned.

"I'm sorry about that, Corporal," he replied with deep sincerity. "I lost my head."

"Nothing to be sorry about," said Weatherby, "but you needn't think you're going to get away with it. Just as soon as I get this leg of mine in shape, you and I are going to have another session down behind the stables. Nothing like a good scrap to seal the bonds of friendship and all that you know."

A slow smile sped across Terry's face.

"I'll be there, Corporal," he promised.

THE PARSON'S SON

By Robert Service

*This is the song of the parson's son, as he squats in his shack alone,
On the wild, weird nights, when the Northern Lights shoot up from the frozen
zone,
And it's sixty below, and couched in the snow the hungry huskies moan:*

"I'm one of the Arctic brotherhood, I'm an old-time pioneer.
I came with the first—O God! how I've cursed this Yukon—but still I'm here.
I've sweated athirst in its summer heat, I've frozen and starved in its cold;
I've followed my dreams by its thousand streams, I've toiled and moiled for
its gold.

"Look at my eyes—been snow-blind twice; look where my foot's half gone;
And that gruesome scar on my left cheek, where the frost-fiend bit to the bone.
Each one a brand of this devil's land, where I've played and I've lost the game,
A broken wreck with a craze for 'hooch,' and never a cent to my name.

"This mining is only a gamble; the worst is as good as the best;
I was in with the bunch and I might have come out right on top with the rest;
With Cormack, Ladue and Macdonald—O God! but it's hell to think
Of the thousands and thousands I've squandered on cards and women and drink.

"In the early days we were just a few, and we hunted and fished around,
Nor dreamt by our lonely camp-fires of the wealth that lay under the ground.
We traded in skins and whiskey, and I've often slept under the shade
Of that lone birch tree on Bonanza, where the first big find was made.

FROM BALLADS OF A CHEECHAKO BY ROBERT SERVICE
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"We were just like a great big family, and every man had his squaw,
And we lived such a wild, free, fearless life beyond the pale of the law;
Till sudden there came a whisper, and it maddened us every man,
And I got in on Bonanza before the big rush began.

"Oh, those Dawson days, and the sin and the blaze, and the town all open wide!
(If God made me in His likeness, sure He let the devil inside.)
But we all were mad, both the good and the bad, and as for the women, well—
No spot on the map in so short a space has hustled more souls to hell.

"Money was just like dirt there, easy to get and to spend.
I was all caked in on a dance-hall jade, but she shook me in the end.
It put me queer, and for near a year I never drew sober breath,
Till I found myself in the bughouse ward with a claim staked out on death.

"Twenty years in the Yukon, struggling along its creeks;
Roaming its giant valleys, scaling its god-like peaks;
Bathed in its fiery sunsets, fighting its fiendish cold—
Twenty years in the Yukon . . . twenty years—and I'm old.

"Old and weak, but no matter, there's 'hooch' in the bottle still.
I'll hitch up the dogs to-morrow, and mush down the trail to Bill.
It's so long dark, and I'm lonesome—I'll just lay down on the bed;
To-morrow I'll go . . . to-morrow . . . I guess I'll play on the red.

". . . Come, Kit, your pony is saddled. I'm waiting, dear, in the court . . .
. . . Minnie, you devil, I'll kill you if you skip with that flossy sport . . .
. . . How much does it go to the pan, Bill? . . . play up, School, and play
the game . . .
. . . Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name . . ."

*This was the song of the parson's son, as he lay in his bunk alone,
Ere the fire went out and the cold crept in, and his blue lips ceased to moan,
And the hunger-maddened malamutes had torn him flesh from bone.*

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BEWARE FORT RELIANCE!

By ALEXANDER WALLACE

He was Factor at Fort Reliance . . . uncrowned king of the Great Slave district . . . baron of a lush fur empire. No, Rough Red Peters wasn't stepping aside for the first down-country cheechako to slap him with a set of "get-out" orders.

WITH THE LEAN, hard years of his apprenticeship as far behind him as Fort Chipewyan, Ross Baring no longer paddled his own canoe. He had hired four Cree Indians to do that for him, while he took his ease flaunting the red flag of the Hudson's Bay Company at the bow of his birch-bark.

He was proud of the flag although he had no grandiose illusions about his newly acquired factorship. Five years spent behind a counter at Chipewyan, doling out *regales* of tobacco and enough tartan cloth to reach to the Pole and back, had taught him that neither glory nor wealth was to be gained in the Company's service.

Nevertheless, the flag was the thing he'd worked and sweated for. It was his passport into the Great Lone Land that knew not the face of man or the crack of a rifle,

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where endless lakes re-echoed nothing but the melancholy cry of gulls, the yodel of the Loon or the moan of the wolf.

As to the factorship, MacPhane, the Chief Factor at Chipewyan, had spoken plainly about that; and, the truth was, Baring was a little afraid of what he would find when he arrived at the post.

"Fort Reliance will make or break you," had been MacPhane's parting admonition. "You're superseding Red Peters an' it's no warm welcome you'll get. Aye, an' there's two women up there—so, I don't want you to go with a chip on your shoulder. But watch Peters, laddie—watch him!"

To which was to be added the gossip he'd picked up at the several posts he'd already passed through. Peters, it seemed, had a reputation in the Great Slave District—an ugly one. No fur baron had ruled his district with more feudal autocracy

than did Peters. Tales of his cruelty passed from post to post. It was even said that he had his own executioner, a half-breed called Pimtose. If murder was done among the Indians, Pimtose went out after his man. A bullet from behind a rock or a tree expiated the crime. And sometimes, it was whispered, the crime was no more than the displeasure of Red Peters.

Moreover, MacPhane had said that there had been a big fall off in the "take" in Peters' district, which might be due to the ebb and flow of animal life. But his sudden decision to recall Peters suggested to Baring that he had another explanation at the back of his canny brain. Upon turning it all over in his mind, Baring concluded that Factor at Fort Reliance might look well enough on a letter head, but it could spell out a hell of a lot of trouble for him in the not distant future.

Suddenly the Cree guide in the stern called out, pointing his dripping paddle shoreward.

"Him Lobestick, Okemow," he announced in guttural English. "Cabin there, make camp now."

Looking in the direction indicated, Baring saw an uncommonly tall pine from which the upper and lower branches had been trimmed—a monument to commemorate the passing of some voyageur of old.

"All right, Meeku," Baring called.

The canoe slanted toward a rocky cove. The cabin was amid the jack-pine at some distance from the lake shore, Meeku told him.

"You go look Lobestick," he suggested. "Him belong big white Tyee."

BARING took his rifle and scrambled up the rocks. There was a stretch of level ground, a carpet of caribou-moss and purple whortleberries. Beyond a trail, a mere whizzed line, ran through a stunted forest of spruce and pine interspersed with white birch. Some of the trees had attained full height, others, though a century old, were no higher than his shoulder.

He sauntered down the trail his eyes and ears alert for game. A little farther on the moss-covered roof of the cabin showed above a clump of dwarfed pine. He quickened his pace, then halted suddenly as he was about to step out into the small clearing. He was down wind from

the cabin and the acrid smell of smoldering wood-smoke hung in the air. Someone had doused a fire with water. As he lifted his head to look at the cabin's stone chimney a spurt of flame flashed before his eyes. A bullet tore through his fringed deer-skin jacket and burned his left shoulder. The spiteful crack of a rifle slapped against his ear drums. Instantly he dived for a bush. A second bullet clipped a sprig of willow and sang past his ear like a hornet.

The flash had come from a small window in the side of the cabin facing him. Aware that the hidden marksman would be able to see movement through the flimsy shield of willows. Baring hugged the mossy ground and lay very still.

He had heard of bushed trappers driven mad by loneliness and his first thought was that he had a homicidal maniac to deal with. He waited quietly for Meeku and the Crees to come up the trail, hoping that they would distract the rifleman's attention or scare him off.

But as the minutes dragged on and there was no sign of Meeku, another idea quickened his pulse with alarm. It was Meeku who had suggested that he go on to the cabin alone. He'd hired the Cree only three days ago and didn't know much about him. It could be that he'd been led into an ambush. The fellow in the shanty could be Pimtose, Peters' executioner! He broke into a cold sweat as it occurred to him that, if such was the case, he was caught between two fires, with Pimtose in the cabin and the Indians up the trail behind.

He threw a quick glance down the trail. Nothing moved. His eyes came back to the cabin and caught the glint of sunlight on metal as a rifle barrel was thrust out of the window. His gun flashed upward. He fired twice, thumb-whipping his single action colt. Splinters flew from the side of the window, and a startled yelp followed by the tinkle of falling glass reached Baring's ears.

"You can keep your shanty, friends," muttered Baring. "There's plenty of room outside."

The next moment he was racing down the trail. A few strides carried him around a bend and out of sight of the cabin, but he kept on running until he

reached the rocks below which he had landed. The canoe was gone.

Scanning the surface of the Lake he saw the flash of paddles away to the east. Evidently Meeku had decided to go on without his Okemow. According to pre-arranged plans? Or had the shooting frightened them? Baring's face twisted into a grimace of disgust. He emptied his colt into the air. The rhythmic flash of the paddles seemed to quicken. He stood cursing while the canoe vanished into the purple haze and the hollow, mocking echoes of his shots came back in his ears, and then were lost in the unlimited silence.

Still cursing Meeku and the whole of the Cree nation, Baring crouched behind a rock where he had a good view of the open ground between him and the cabin. He thought of setting out on foot for Fort Reliance, but decided against it. If it were twenty-five miles by water, it was likely to be five times that distance around the sloughs and inlets of the lake shore. Moreover, assuming that the fellow in the cabin was Pimtose, he'd be stalked every pace of the way. And assuming that he was not, it added up to much the same thing. It didn't matter much if a bushwhacker were sane or crazy.

He squinted up the trail, undecided whether to wait for the other to show himself or to go up after him. The pangs of hunger decided the issue. He slung his rifle and reloaded his colt.

"You're going to have company for supper, friend," he said aloud. "Or one of us is going to get a belly full of lead."

He circled widely, moving swiftly and silently through the pigmy forest. The Lobestick marked the position of the cabin. He came out facing it. The log walls were green with moss. The door stood open. Even the animal life of the woods was venturing it, for he saw a ground squirrel come out and sit nibbling unconcernedly on the door step. But his tense attitude of expectancy did not relax. The open door looked too much like an invitation to step from cover and get plugged. After a moment's hesitation he began to circle the clearing.

He had completed half the circle when he stopped suddenly. A sapling hung like a limp arm from its stem, about shoulder high. He stooped, examining the ground.

The bleeding stem of lichen, the crushed berries of ground juniper, told him that his quarry had passed that way, running. He followed the spoor until satisfied that the other had not turned and circled back. He returned to the cabin.

It was a single-roomed shanty, a section of the roof had sagged in and it smelt musty. There was a pole bunk against one wall, a stone chimney with an opening for a fire stood opposite to it. A tin mug and a plate with the remains of a meal on it stood upon a table of whip-sawn spruce. Over by the window there was a babiche-netted chair. Baring's eyes were arrested by the gleam of a brass cartridge-case. He picked it up and rolled it in the palm of his big hand, thoughtfully. A Winchester .30-30, not the kind of weapon he'd expect to find in the hands of an Indian trapper.

He barred the door of the cabin against a surprise visit and then searched the room for food. He found a grub-box better stocked than the one he had carried with him.

"That's one up for you, Pimtose," muttered Baring.

An hour later he sat drowsing before the fire as the late sun sank and the shadows blended under the stunted trees. Certain that no one could enter the cabin without waking him, he made a pillow of his jacket, stretched out before the fire, and was soon asleep.

When he awoke a shaft of sunlight lay across the dirt floor like a bright dagger, and there was the echo of a shout in his ears—too distinct to be the recollection of a fading dream. He was on his feet in an instant and peering out of the window.

II

TWO MEN were coming up the trail. One a half-breed with an mangy muskrat cap set high on his head. He had a hooked nose and a protruding nether-lip, like the prehensile lip of a moose. The other was a powerful man, middle aged, and wearing black and white checked pants tucked into beaded leggings and belted with a gaudy scarf. He was bare headed and his red hair and beard flamed against the greenery like a torch. Both men were armed. The half-breed with a rifle—a

Winchester. Peters with a heavy revolver slung from a full cartridge belt.

With a thin smile on his lips Baring spun the cylinder of his colt, then quietly unbarred the door and stepped out into the sunlight. The corner of the cabin hid him from the pair coming up the trail. He flattened his back against the logs and waited. When they were within ten paces he stepped out suddenly.

Both men froze. There was a moment of profound silence, then the muzzle of the half-breed's rifle swung upward. Baring's colt flashed from its holster and exploded. The half-breed's cap jumped from his head, his rifle dropped from nerveless hands and his jaw sagged open. Peters' hand had been moving toward his hip, his hand froze six inches above the butt of his gun.

Peters' right hand came up to tug at his beard.

His tawny eyes were blank, his leathery face expressionless.

"Kind of quick on the trigger, ain't you?" he observed.

"Seems to be a habit in these parts, Mr. Peters," Baring replied.

Life and expression came to Peters' face. "Hell, you're not crazy!" he boomed with a relieved grin. "You're Baring, the new Factor."

"That's right," answered Baring, ignoring the hand the other held out to him. "But you thought I was the other fellow, eh?" he added, smiling.

"Sure, what the hell else!" exclaimed Peters. "You see," he explained, "Meeku came in late yesterday afternoon. Scared stiff he was. All I could get out of him was that the new Master had been plugged by someone. When we yelled just now an' got no answer it looked as if he was right. Accordin' to Meeku the fellow took a few shots at him, too."

"Dem Indians," the half-breed spoke for the first time, "I tink dey hear shot an' run like hell now, maybe."

"Say, that's right!" Peters turned to the half-breed and jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Get down after them, Pimtose."

Pimtose stooped to pick up his rifle. Baring placed his foot on the butt. As the half-breed straightened up anger flared in Peters' eyes.

"What's wrong with you?" he demanded. "D'you want to walk to the fort?"

"He won't need the rifle," said Baring, coldly.

Peters bridled his temper with a visible effort. Then he nodded to Pimtose. Baring watched the half-breed disappear down the trail, wondering if there was another rifle in the canoe. Peters' booming voice cut in on him.

"You've got something on your mind. What is it?"

Instinct warned him against Peters, but when it came to putting his suspicions into words their very flimsiness left him feeling limp and baffled. Actually, there was nothing more concrete than a Winchester rifle and a well-stocked grub-box. He was forced to admit that Peters had said nothing that he had not thought of himself. And yet—

"Well?" Peters prompted him.

"Have you had any trouble with free traders?" Baring asked.

"Plenty! I ran one of 'em out a while back—an' he won't forget it! I'd say he's the fellow that bushwhacked you. He saw the Company's flag an' figured to settle an old grudge."

"Where would he get his grub?"

"From the Lampson and Hubbard outfit. They're elbowing their way in here now. They've got a post about sixty miles nor'west of Reliance. Lampson House, they call it." He spat in disgust.

"This country's gettin' crowded, my friend. And the Company does nothing about it but blame the likes of you an' me."

Baring sighed inwardly, Peters had all the answers. The colt spun on his finger and plumped snugly back into its holster. He wasn't convinced but he wanted better reason before he flatly accused Peters of attempted murder.

"We've got five hours paddling ahead of us," Peters said, and turning abruptly led the way down the trail. Baring picked up the rifle and followed him.

Pimtose and Meeku were waiting in the canoe.

"Watcheer, Okemow!" Meeku greeted Baring.

"Shut up!" bellowed Peters. "You've got a dose of the cat coming to you—you yellow dog!"

Fear leaped into the Indian's eyes, then his face lost all expression. When Baring asked him why he had not come back in answer to the shots he answered:

"Tink crazy man shoot," and would say no more.

"**T**HEY took their places in the canoe, Peters at the stern paddle. In a moment the birch-bark was skimming across the lake.

"Were you expecting me, Peters?" Baring asked, as they paused for a rest after an hour's brisk paddling.

"First I heard of you was from Meeku," Peters answered curtly.

"MacPhane might have warned you," said Baring.

There was bitterness in Peters' short laugh.

"That's the way it goes," Peters said. "You'll sweat and freeze to make rich men richer, and when trade falls off they'll kick you out. Like me, the first you'll know of it is when some young——" He broke off. His paddle stabbed into the water and the canoe lurched forward.

Baring now was sure of one thing. Under his hard skin Peters was seething with resentment, but was holding himself in check with an iron hand for some good reason.

Baring got his first glimpse of Fort Reliance shortly afterward. Very desolate it looked as seen through the pale mist that hung over the Lake. A cluster of several green-roofed cabins crouched on the lake shore, with the inevitable, white flag pole marking the position of the Master's House. The Yellow Knife trappers were in. Their birch-barks littered the shore like ripe pods fallen from the trees. Smoke rose from their black, caribou-skin lodges clustered outside the serrated stockade.

As they drew near black puffs of smoke unfolded on the landing stage and the crash of musketry rolled across the Lake. The Company's flag had been sighted and the Indians were saluting it with customary extravagance. Tomorrow they'd be paying a stiff price for cartridges in the Company's store.

As soon as Baring stepped ashore he was hemmed in by snarling, half-starved dogs and a mass of excited, sweating hu-

manity, exhaling an odor that made his nostrils quiver.

"Watcheer! Watcheer! Okemow! sounded all around him. Guttural pidgin English mingled with softer *patois* of a few French-Indians. Only the squaws, some slender and soft eyed, others like shapeless bales of tartan cloth, stood aloof and looked on stolidly. Peters elbowed his way through the crowd. Baring followed.

"You'll have them an' the Dog-Ribs to look after," Peters told him as they entered the stockade. "D'you know what that means?"

"I've done five years at Chipewyan," Baring answered.

Peters looked him up and down with a sardonic smile.

"MacPhane must be in his dotage," he commented. "Hell, this is no place for a store clerk! You won't last a winter!"

Peters chuckled, "MacPhane's the man that's betting on you. Not me."

The fort was built on much the same plan as the others Baring had passed through on his way north. A cribbed broadwalk bisected it. The Men's House and the fur loft was on the right hand, the store and a couple of small cabins on the left. The Master's House, a four-roomed bungalow of neatly dovetailed pine logs with a bar-roofed annex, stood facing the gates and the Lake. But Fort Reliance possessed one feature that Baring had not seen elsewhere. Beside the flag pole there was a whipping post with rusty chains hanging from it.

"It's not an ornament," Peters told him. "It takes guts to stay on top here. There'll be no Mounties to pull you out when you get into a jamb."

An enormous stove occupied the center of the bungalow's main room which was evidently used as a combined office and living-room. It was equipped with babichennetted chairs and a sofa. The table was set for a meal.

Two women came in from the kitchen, obviously mother and daughter. The elder woman had greying hair, but she was still handsome, with fine dark eyes. There was Cree blood in her veins, just enough to put a shadow in her skin. The other was a willowy girl of eighteen with black, curling hair, disconcertingly pretty.

"My wife and daughter," Peters intro-

duced them curtly, and took his place at the head of the table.

Under the surface of conventional greetings, Baring sensed a stiffness in Mrs. Peters' attitude and what looked like downright hostility in the girl's eyes. He caught himself staring at her, wondering why her hair was not tinged with the red of her father's beard. It was better the way it was, he decided. Nature had done a perfect job. The girl must have divined his thoughts for suddenly the coldness left her eyes and color mounted to her cheeks, staining the curve of her full breasts revealed by her low-cut tartan shirt.

"Sit down," growled Peters. "Let me see your blue paper."

III

BARING handed him the Company's long, blue envelope. While Peters read MacPhane's orders the woman probed Baring for news of the outside. Their curiosity was insatiable.

"Well, I'm damned!" Peters' voice broke in on the barrage of questions. He folded the blue paper and fixed his gaze on Baring's face.

"MacPhane thinks it would be a good idea for me to stay on until next spring. Show you the ropes. But he leaves it up to you. How do you feel about it?"

There was an awkward pause and Baring was conscious that all eyes were upon him.

He knew that he wouldn't get along with Peters. His instinct was against MacPhane's suggestion, but the women complicated things. They'd had no warning, they wouldn't be prepared to leave.

"I'll need all the help and advice I can get," said he. He glanced at the girl quickly and was surprised to see her lips tighten. As their eyes met she rose quickly and left the room.

But Peters was so pleased with his decision that he jumped to his feet and thumped him on the back.

"Glad to help you!" he gushed. "We'll do fine. By God, I'll show that Scotch skinflint a trick or two before I'm through!"

Baring was given one of the three bedrooms off the main room. After he had

stowed away his gear he left the bungalow and went in search of Meeku. There were still some questions he wanted to ask.

Outside the fort the heat was almost tropical. The huskies whimpered in the dog-yard, with their tongues hanging out; the mosquitoes were a terror to man and beast. A medicine man was tom-toming down at the Yellow Knife camp. Evidently the Indians had not arrived long before him, for a long line of squaws was toiling up from the Lake, bent double under bundles of fur. Baring looked around for Meeku but could see nothing of him.

He went over to the store. It had the usual L-shaped counter, to prevent too many Indians from crowding in at the same time. A sinewy, young Cree was arranging goose-quill tokens on the counter. His blue-black hair was bound with a scarlet band and reached down to his square-cut shoulders. White teeth showed in a flashing smile as he came forward with outstretched hand. It was the first sincere gesture of welcome Baring had experienced since his arrival. He clasped the young Indian's hand firmly and greeted him in his own tongue.

But the Cree was as proud of his English as Baring was of his Cree, and their talk became a jumble of both. The Indian answered his questions volubly.

"I am called Charlie Karkise," he told Baring. "The priest at Norway House taught me to read and write. I am one very smart fello, sir," he concluded with his infectious grin.

"How long have you been here, Charlie?"

"Since the Goose-Moon, sir. Mis. MacPhane send me from Fort Smith."

"H-m-m." Baring mused with a slight frown. Since Charlie had been at the fort for only a few months he wouldn't know much about local conditions.

"What's the girl's name over at the Master's House?"

Charlie's grin broadened: "She plenty good looker, eh? She called Jeanne Lautec."

"Lautec!" Baring echoed with quickening interest. "She's not Peters' daughter, then."

Charlie scratched his head. "Tink maybe so, she belong Factor who die here.

Mr. Peters he marry up wid—what you call him?"

"Lautec's widow?" suggested Baring.

"That's right, sir! Widow—like widow with N out. I mind that, you-betcha!"

"Where was Pimtose last night?" asked Baring casually.

Charlie scowled and shrugged. "Tink maybe he drunk over at Master's House."

"Did you see him there, Charlie?"

Charlie shook his head, "Him no good. Don't see for two t'ree days, maybe. Sometimes him drunk for week!"

Guttural cries and raucous laughter cut off further conversation. The squaws, having deposited their furs in the fur shed for safe keeping until the trading began, had come to collect the customary gratuity. The bucks were among them, stripped to the waist and smelling strongly of bear oil. With Charlie's help Baring issued out flour and tobacco—a good deal more than was customary in the sound belief that a good harvest comes from a good sowing, and to commemorate the occasion of his arrival.

The supper bell was ringing over at the Master's House before they had finished. Leaving Charlie to finish up he started for the bungalow. As he turned off the broad-walk he almost collided with Pimtose coming out of the bungalow.

The half-breed gave him a startled look and his hand flew to the open neck of his shirt. There was something furtive about the gesture and Baring stepped into the half-breed's path as he attempted to sidle around him.

"I hear that you were drunk last night, Pimtose," said Baring.

"By gar, dat dirty lie!" Anger flared behind his snaky eyes.

Baring watched his fingers fumbling with the buttons of his shirt.

"If you weren't drunk, where were you?" he demanded.

"Dat my business," retorted Pimtose.

Baring's hand shot out and, catching the collar of the other's shirt, laid his left shoulder bare. A wad of gauze held in place by court-plaster was revealed.

"Has Mr. Peters been taking splinters out of your shoulder?" asked Baring, coolly.

Pimtose tore himself free, leaving the

collar of his shirt in Baring's hand. He staggered back and fell. As he picked himself up he whirled suddenly and flung a handful of gravel into Baring's face. Then, with a cry of animal ferocity, he lunged forward, long-bladed hunting knife in hand.

BLINDED and with his eyes burning like balls of fire, Baring acted on instinct and saved himself by leaping forward to meet the half-breed's spring. They collided with a sickening shock. Steel burned across Baring's ribs as they went down in a heap. He caught Pimtose's knife hand and held on for his life.

Over and over they rolled. Baring heard a woman's scream as they went over the edge of the boardwalk and landed with a thud that made Baring's bones rattle. Pimtose was on top, snarling and spitting like a wild cat. Saliva dribbled from his mouth into Baring's face as he threw his weight across Baring's arm, trying to force the blade home. Baring, with desperate strength, held him off almost at arms' length. He was conscious of the pad of moccasined feet. Soon a crowd of Yellow Knife bucks was milling around the struggling pair, yelling and stamping their feet.

Suddenly Baring twisted and got his feet in the pit of Pimtose's stomach. The next moment the half-breed flew over his head. Baring had retained his hold on the other's wrist and Pimtose screamed in agony as the bone of his right arm was snapped like a dry stick. He made no attempt to rise but lay on the ground moaning.

Baring got to his feet wiping grit from his eyes and with blood oozing from the gash in his side. As he stood swaying a gun exploded and a bullet whizzed overhead. His eyes were still streaming but he got a blurred picture of Peters standing in the doorway of the cabin with a gun in his hand. Jeanne stood beside him holding the back of her hand to her cheek. It looked as if Peters had struck her.

"What the hell are you shooting at?" Baring demanded.

Peters' gun had dropped until it hung limply at his side. Jeanne turned quickly and went into the cabin. Peters met Baring's gaze unflinchingly.

"No one in particular," he answered without hesitation. "I heard the row and came out. You can't trust those Indians, sonny. They looked ugly. I fired a shot to scare 'em off."

Exasperation twisted Baring's face into a grimace. Always a glib explanation! He held Peters' eyes with a steady look.

"Fix up Pimtose's arm," Baring ordered. "We'll get rid of him."

Peters' eyes flared, "All right, if that's the way you want it. But I'd flay the hide offa him! Believe me, sonny, it's the only way. If an Indian talks back, flog him. If he puts a hand on a weapon, shoot him."

"What's wrong with his shoulder?" asked Baring.

"Oh, a knife wound," Peters answered indifferently. "He's been drinking lately. Got into a fight with one of the bucks over a squaw."

An expression of astonishment mingled with admiration came to Baring's face. Surely, if he were not hearing the truth, he was in the presence of the fastest-thinking liars that ever was in the North West. It occurred to him that he was hopelessly outclassed, that he might do better if he kept his mouth shut.

"You'd better get Jeanne to dress that cut," advised Peters. "I'll look after Pimtose at the Men's House."

The girl already had hot water and bandages on the table when Baring entered the room. He stripped off his shirt displaying broad shoulders, with rippling muscles under bronzed skin. The girl probed his wound with deft, gentle fingers. Her sleeves were rolled up. Admiring the soft roundness of her arms Baring's eyes came to rest on a purple bruise that was just beginning to show above her left wrist.

"That's a nasty bruise you have."

"Oh, it's nothing."

"Seems that you're going to have another on your cheek," persisted Baring. "What did he hit you for?"

"Really, Mr. Baring! Your imagination——"

"It's quite good," interposed Baring with a grin. "To demonstrate, he tried to take a shot at me and you got that bruise when you struck up his gun. Then he slapped you."

She gave him a sharp look. "You didn't see that—you couldn't!"

"No," Baring admitted. "It's just guessing, but——"

"It certainly is," she cut in. "You're right about the bruise, but he was aiming at Pimtose, not you."

"Holy cats!" groaned Baring. "You too!"

"What does that mean?" Her eyes challenged him.

"Say it again, Jeanne," he urged her earnestly. "If it comes from you, I'll believe it, so help me!" He winced as a wad soaked in balsam was applied to his wound.

"Be still, baby!" chided the girl, and thereafter became absorbed in her work.

"There!" she said when he was taped and bandaged to her satisfaction. "You'll live." She picked up her bowl and started for the kitchen.

Baring stopped her. "You didn't repeat what I asked," said he.

She turned and considered him with a frown between her eyes.

"You stop imagining things," she warned. "You look out for Pimtose. He'll——" She broke off as Peters came into the room. Baring saw her lips tighten as she turned quickly and left the room.

"Pimtose is leaving with Meeku in the morning," Peters told him. "And I've told Charlie to open up for trade right away. Does that suit you?"

"It does," said Baring.

Thereafter he was up to his eyes in work with little time to think of anything else. After the Yellow Knife came the Dog-Ribs, then a clan of Slaveys pitched their lodges on the lake shore. He spent his days in the store, sweating amid a mass of savage humanity; his nights in the fur loft with Peters, checking over accounts. The only relief from the monotonous grind came when Jeanne sang for them in the big living-room.

But he seldom found himself alone with the girl. Mrs. Peters, or Peters himself, always seemed to be within earshot. Baring had the uncomfortable feeling of being watched. Though Peters gave no sign of open hostility, there was bitterness in his speech and resentment smouldered behind his tawny eyes. He was like an open keg

of gun-powder, just wanting a spark to touch him off.

"I don't think your father trusts me with you," Baring remarked to the girl once when he'd succeeded in eluding his watch-dogs for a few minutes.

"Perhaps it's me he doesn't trust," she replied with an enigmatical smile. But when Baring asked to be enlightened, she shook her head and would say no more.

Insensibly the summer glided into autumn with its equinoctial storms and snow. The geese went honking southward, foretelling of an early winter. The Indians departed for their trap lines, Then *Kee-watin*, God of the North Wind, breathed on the land and it became a dead world wrapped in a shroud of snow.

It was the custom to extend credit to the Indians against the next season's catch. To each, according to his merit as a trapper, was the rule. Baring had based their credits on Peters' record of the last year. But when he checked over the season's work he was surprised to find that the take exceeded that of the previous season by one third. The Indians had deserved more. It worried him. A low fur-debt meant that the Indians had gone out with short rations, and that would mean starvation for a family cut off by a blizzard.

"How do you account for it?" he asked Peters, who stood beside him.

They were alone in the fur shed, stamping their feet and beating their arms against their bodies to keep their blood in circulation, for the Company forbade heat in the fur shed.

"You can't tell," Peters shrugged. "There's never two seasons alike. If the Indians were doing business with that free trader last season, that might account for it."

"Yes," said Baring thoughtfully. "I think I'll patrol the winter camps and talk to the Chiefs about that, and——"

"What good will it do?" Peters cut in sharply. "They won't talk."

"They'll talk to me," said Baring confidently. "I'll take Charlie along and pull out in the morning."

Peters' eyes clouded, "Better leave well enough alone, sonny."

"Why?" asked Baring, with a sharp look at the other.

"I'm telling you—just leave it alone!"

"I can't see it your way," replied Baring.

"You blasted fool!" Peters launched a blow that would have felled Baring had it landed.

But Baring, watching his face, had seen it coming, in fact he'd seen it coming for a long time. He side-stepped and, pivoting on the ball of his foot, landed a hard right swing on Peters' ear as he lunged past. The blow knocked Peters to his knees. On all fours he shook his red head and then got slowly to his feet, with his eyes blazing.

"So, that's how you want it!" he snarled.

"It's up to you," said Baring coolly.

"I'll send you back to MacPhane in a sack, you——" Peters finished with a vile string of epithets. Then he lowered his head and rushed.

Baring was forced back against the wall. Peters jolted his head against the logs with the heel of his palm, at the same time he drove his knee into Baring's groin. Baring doubled up. A bellow of triumph burst from Peters' lips, his other knee came up and met Baring's head on the way down. With blood pouring from his mouth and nostrils, Baring clumped to the dirt floor. Consciousness slipped from him.

When he came to Peters was standing over him.

"Had enough, sonny?" Peters grinned down at him.

IV

BARING attempted to sit up. Peters laughed and pushed him back with his moccasined foot. His laugh ended in a yelp of pain as Baring caught his foot and twisted it savagely. With another quick twist and a heave, Baring threw him. Peters turned half a somersault and landed on his back with a thud that jolted the wind out of him.

Baring was on his feet instantly. Bubbles of blood burst on his lips as he breathed. There was maddening ache in the pit of his stomach.

Peters got to his feet. Baring waited. He had learned his lesson. Peters was murderous in close combat. As Peters crouched, Baring began to circle him, wary

as a lynx. Suddenly he darted in and closed Peters' left eye with a hard jab. Peters bellowed and rushed. A hard left and right, timed to a fraction, stopped him. Baring faded back with a thin smile on his lips.

Roaring out curses, Peters rushed again and aimed a vicious kick at Baring's stomach. Baring twisted away and, before Peters could recover, he was in like a flash. Peters grunted as blows thudded his body, driving him across the floor of the shed. He was gaping and swinging blindly. A blow flush on the chin buckled his knees, but he staggered back against the wall and managed to stay on his feet. He came off the wall with his head lowered and tried to bull Baring into a corner.

Peters' eyes were glazed, but he toppled toward Baring with his arms wide-spread to grapple with his foe. Baring set him up with a left jab; then, measuring the distance with deliberation, let drive with all he had left. He felt the shock of the blow up to his shoulder. The whites of Peters' eyes showed. Baring swung at him again. The blow passed over Peters' head as he fell.

Baring stood over him, wiping blood from his mouth with one of the mittens that hung from the cord about his neck. He was about to turn away when it occurred to him that Peters would freeze if he left him there. He got the unconscious man's arm over his shoulder and heaved him up.

Outside the night was frigid and brilliant with star-light. The northern lights danced in ghostly procession across the sky. Light from the bungalow and the Men's House lay in yellow swathes across the snow.

Baring was floundering through the snow dragging Peters when one of the dogs barked. Soon the whole pack was snarling and yelping in chorus. Thinking that an Indian prowler, or a lynx, might have disturbed them, Baring stopped, his eyes traveling around the circle of the serrated stockade. Then he heard a click—a metallic sound, magnified by the still, crisp air. He eased Peters' weight down into the snow and stood listening, his eyes probing the shadows. A figure drifted from the stockade across to the Men's House. Baring's hand flew to the slit

side-pocket of his parka. As his hand touched the butt of his gun an orange flame blotted out the night.

As consciousness returned, his first thought was that he was pegged out on his back while someone branded him with a hot iron. He squealed and opened his eyes.

He was lying on his own bed, fully dressed. He wasn't pegged out, but Charlie had both his arms pinned down. Jeanne was bending over him, dabbing at his head with a sponge. Memory of the night's events came back in a surging flood. He relaxed.

"That's better," Jeanne smiled down at him. "But, my goodness, I've never heard such language before!"

"I thought they were branding me," Baring explained apologetically.

"Branding you—who?"

"All the fiends in hell!" He caught her hand. "Who did it?"

Her eyes avoided his. "You've been unconscious for two hours. A bad head wound, quite deep."

"Pimtose, he come back," Charlie put in. "He don't go to Resolution. He stay in de cabin by dat Lobestick, you-betcha!"

"Where is he now?" Baring pushed the girl aside and sat up.

Charlie and the girl exchanged quick glances. The young Cree walked over to the window. Jeanne fussed with her bandages.

"Well?" prompted Baring, looking from one to the other, sensing that they were trying to hide something from him. "Let me have it."

Jeanne faced him suddenly, "It's not your fault," she burst into a passionate denial. "You couldn't help it—you mustn't blame yourself——"

Baring sprang to his feet with an oath. The girl caught his arm as he swayed unsteadily.

"You don't need to tell me the rest," he said. "Pimtose and your father have pulled out with the furs."

She nodded, and the moist pity in her eyes struck at Baring's stomach like fangs.

"They took the freight sled and all the dogs," she told him. "If you were fit for the trail you couldn't follow them."

"Where are they heading for?" he asked.

"To Lampson House."

BARING sat on the bed. His head sank between his hands. He saw it now. Peters had been selling the Company's furs to Lampson and Hubbard right along. He saw how it could be done. Pimtose, posing as a free trapper, had run the furs over to Lampson House. A simple imposture, because Lampson and Hubbard were too new in the country to suspect the fraud, and too eager to get the edge on their powerful rival to ask questions.

The worst of it was that he'd been warned, sent up to watch Peters, but Peters had got away with a fortune in furs right under his nose! Well, he thought bitterly, Fort Reliance had broken him. MacPhane had stacked his chips on a loser.

The old sourdoughs would laugh him out of the country. He could see them sitting around a red-hot stove, chuckling—"Did you hear that one about the *checha* up at Reliance—" Baring's head jerked up and his jaw set. No, not that? Laughter of that kind could kill a man slowly.

"How far is it to the first Indian camp, Charlie?" he asked suddenly.

"Twenty mile, Okemow."

"Good! There's a hundred dollars for you if you're back by morning with a dog team and sled."

Charlie shook his head, "I go, but no good, Okemow. Mister Peters, he make Lampson House tomorrow."

"Sure, I know," said Baring quietly. "That's where I'm going."

The girl gave a cry and caught his arm.

"They'll shoot you!" she warned.

"Get going," said Baring to Charlie. When he had gone Baring turned to the girl and looked at her steadily. Her chin tilted up defiantly.

"All right, go ahead and say what you're thinking," she challenged him. "I knew, but I didn't tell you. Then her eyes filled with tears and she went on passionately:

"It's only half the truth, but I don't care what you think of me! Only my mother—understand, she knew nothing, nothing! She would believe no wrong of him until we brought you in here, bleeding. You leave her alone. She's been hurt enough. She—she won't even talk to me!"

Looking down on her bent head Baring

wondered what it was in the nature of women that made them cling to me like Peters.

"Do you think you could love me like that, Jeanne?"

The next moment she was in his arms, her lips clinging to his. Baring felt the warmth of her full breasts through his shirt, the vibrant pulse of her heart.

A long time later she stirred in his arms and said:

"I thought you'd hate me!"

"For saving my life, Jeanne? He wasn't shooting at Pimtose when we had that fight."

"No," she admitted. Then her eyes clouded. "Why must you go? For my sake——"

"You can't ask that of me!" Baring interposed.

Knowing the kind of men the North breeds, she sighed; and, twining her fingers in his hair, drew his head down to her lips.

On the following morning Baring pulled out with six big malamute dogs attached, Indian fashion, to a sled of spruce boards with a high, curved front and corded on each side with moose thongs. Ahead Charlie pounded along on snow-shoes, his caribou-skin parka and fringed leggings flapping in the wind.

As they swung north-west around a headland the broad expanse of the Lake opened before them. The undulating ice-heaves rolled away like great, white billows set with millions of sparkling diamonds.

There was a hard crust on the snow and the going was good. Charlie had put moccasins on the dogs' feet and they stepped out briskly with their tails curled over their backs.

The cold probed at Baring's head wound with an icy finger. There was a low, moaning note in the wind. A blizzard was brewing, for the sky was a steely grey in the north and the wind was lifting a white veil of snow from the surface of the frozen Lake. Just as the half-disc of a coppery sun peeked over the serrated roof of the forest they spotted the black skin lodges of a band of Yellow Knife trappers. They angled away heading toward the camp. The Indians came out to meet them.

"Watcheer, watcheer, Okemow!" they greeted Baring. As they crowded around him the smell of their caribou skins almost knocked him down. Quickly he doled out presents of black-twist tobacco.

Had they seen a white man? No, but two sleds had passed during the night, one heavily loaded. They had seen the tracks in the morning. Doubtless, it was the white man, and he was headed for the old fort up the inlet.

The information puzzled Baring. The abandoned fort was well north of Lampson House.

Why had Peters turned out of his way? He consulted Charlie.

"Mister Peters, he plenty smart," commented Charlie, judiciously. "I think maybe he guess that you come after him. He hole up in old fort you betcha!"

"That's luck, Charlie!"

The young Cree gave him a sidelong look:

"Maybe so," said he dubiously. "I tink dat fellow Pimtose, he bushwacking along the trail somewhere. He shoot plenty quick!"

"Could be," Baring admitted, and a cold light came into his eyes. "You stay here, Charlie." He threw his weight against the handle bars of the sled and got it moving. He cracked his whip and the dogs broke into a run. He was not surprised when Charlie came pounding past him and took his place at the head of the string.

They went on without exchanging a word.

Late that afternoon they saw the tracks of the sleds, behind an ice-heave that had protected them from the drifting snow. An hour later the bare chimney of the old fort was showing against the skyline. Lone and stark it looked, like a finger held up in warning. A wisp of smoke was to be seen, rising from one of the cabins that still had a roof on it.

They left the Lake and entered the forest, planning to approach the ruin from the landward side. In the twilight of the forest the going became harder, with the dogs bellying through deep drifts. The wind had slowed and the temperature had dropped with it. The cold was so intense that the trees were bursting with a sound like the report of a small cannon.

THAT was why Baring did not hear the shot. He saw Charlie fall.

"Ho-ah—ah!" he yelled at the dogs. At the same time he turned the sled over and dropped behind it. He lay with his eyes fixed on a clump of jack-pine a hundred yards ahead. Charlie groaned, rolled over, and then began to worm his way through the snow toward the sled. Baring's colt blazed at the clump of jack-pine, covering the Cree's retreat. Charlie flopped down beside him, muttering Cree words that Baring had never heard. A swift examination showed that he had taken the slug high in his left shoulder.

"Can you shoot?" asked Baring.

"Sure ting," replied Charlie.

Baring propped him up against the bottom of the sled. Then he thrust his rifle through the side throngs, prying them up until he had the muzzle of the rifle pointed at the clump of jack-pine.

"Just keep pulling the trigger," he told Charlie. "And keep your head down. I'm going after Pimtose."

He reloaded his colt, then nodded to Charlie. At the first report he started to run for the cover of the trees on his left hand. A bullet sang past his ear, but Charlie was shooting fast, forcing the half-breed to cover. He got a fair sized tree trunk between him and the jack-pine before Pimtose could fire again. Then he ran the gauntlet, floundering from tree to tree, heading for a low ridge that ran between them and the old fort. He made it with bullets humming about his ears like hornets. He smiled grimly as a yell from Charlie warned him that Pimtose had broken cover.

Guessing that the half-breed would try to work his way back to the fort Baring stalked him, crawling swiftly along the line of the frozen sand hill. He flattened out and burrowed into a fox-hole as he saw the peak of a parka appear above the ridge.

Cautiously Pimtose lifted his head and looked around. Seeing nothing he crouched and came over the hill, his head turning as he darted quick glances from left to right. He passed within twenty paces of Baring.

Slowly Baring got to his feet. Throwing his parka open he stood with both hands resting on his gun belt.

"Pimtose!" he called, with a ring in his voice.

The half-breed yelped and wheeled around. He saw a man standing without a weapon in his hand and his beady eyes jumped. The temptation was too great. The muzzle of his rifle swung upward.

Baring's hand flashed down. His draw was flawless. He thumb-whipped the colt and Pimtose dropped with a neat hole between his eyes. Baring turned away with a wry face and went back to Charlie.

"Got to get you back to Fort Reliance, Charlie."

"No," protested Charlie. "I make the Yellow Knife camp all right. Squaw fix me."

Baring shook his head, "No squaw's going to probe for that slug."

He righted the sled and got Charlie into it. Then he covered him with the caribou skin, tucking the rifle in beside him. He was straightening up when Peters spoke behind him.

"All right, sonny! Get them up!"

Baring raised his hands and turned to face Peters.

Peters approached slowly and came to a stop with his rifle muzzle a foot from Baring's stomach. His eyes burned in a frame of hoar frost that clung to his bushy eye brows.

"I've been waiting for you, sonny," he said, with a harsh laugh. "I figured you'd come, an' I figured you'd gun Pimtose an' save me the trouble. If you was as quick with your head as you are with that pop-gun, you'd be quite a man."

Baring did not answer. Peters stood gloating for a moment. Baring watched the hammer of his Winchester move backward.

"This is it, Baring!" he rasped.

There was an explosion. Instinctively Baring clutched at his stomach. He was amazed that he felt no pain. Then his mouth sagged open as he saw Peters fall on his face.

"Lucky ting you put that rifle under de skin, you betcha!" said Charlie, without emotion.

They made the Yellow Knife camp be-

IVORY HOARD

One of the pleasant—and profitable—occupations of the Eskimos of Northwest Alaska is the endless search for old ivory. This consists of the teeth and tusks of walrus. Some of these pieces of ivory have lain in the frozen soil or the sandy beaches of Bering Strait for centuries, until they have become fossilized or mineralized to a certain degree. When made into bracelets, necklaces, cribbage boards, and so forth, this material is highly prized by tourists because of its rich colors—tan, gray, green, brown, red, and black.

On the western side of Bering Strait, the Chukchi and other natives of Northeast Siberia find not only walrus ivory but the massive tusks of the mammoth, particularly after the ice fields have been shoved up onto the beach, or storms and freshets have undermined the terrain. According to one scientist, more than 40,000 mammoth tusks were brought out of Siberia between 1790 and 1890. Apparently these monsters wandered through the tiaga (virgin forest) and the marshes in great herds. There have been found, in comparatively recent years, not only skeletons, but entire carcasses of mammoths, with the flesh, skin, and fur well preserved by the frozen ground, and the blood actually frozen in the arteries.

fore nightfall. Baring sent a party back after the fur sled. Upon closer examination of Charlie's wound he found that the bullet had passed through the fleshy part of the shoulder, leaving a painful but clean wound. They spent the night at the camp.

Charlie announced himself fit for the trail on the following morning.

"Go sick when we get back to de fort," he grinned. "Miss Jeanne, she cook plenty good grub for me, heh?"

"Oh, you're damned right!" laughed Baring. "Nectar and ambrosia for you, feller—you betcha!"

They were soon streaking across the ice for Fort Reliance. As he pounded along behind the sled, Baring thought of Jeanne and the welcome that awaited him there. The warm blood coursed through his veins and he shouted at the dogs urging them on. His echoless "Mush! Mush!" and the crack of his whip were crystal fragments of sound chipped from the Great Silence.

MOOSE BAIT

By CLIFF WALTERS

A man of muscle like Big Moose Rabou should not attempt to live by his wits . . . 'specially when he is only half equipped for the venture.

ALTHOUGH occasionally put to brief use in a barroom battle, Moose Rabou's brawn—two hundred and twenty well distributed pounds—might properly have been termed reserve power. Ten years ago the shaggy dark man, helper of a blacksmith in the North Country, had laid aside his tools and chosen to live by his wits. Since then he had never gone hungry, in jail or out. Frequently he knew the leisure he was enjoying today—chair tilted back against the wall of a smoky room, eyes closed, feigning sleep.

The brawny one hadn't selected this temporary roost at random. It happened to be conveniently near a card table where two men, one of them a gangling redhead and the other small, middle-aged and dark, sat talking together in low tones. Moose, possessed of keen ear and no inhibitions, had often found eavesdropping profitable.

It was hard to catch any of that conversation at first. Yet, as Moose's breathing grew deeper and deeper, the men at the card table grew less wary. The little dark man, speaking with a French accent, said, "You're not a coward, Forge, but you lack ambition. You could make the trip in less than a week and no one would be the wiser."

"It's a dog team I lack, not ambition," said the lanky man whose hair was as red as the flame of a blacksmith's forge; but who had acquired his nickname by forging endorsements on certain checks issued by a fur company in far-off St. Louis—checks never intended for his clawlike hands.

"A thousand dollars worth of pelts to be had for the taking and you're not interested because you lack equipment. Perhaps the Swede should have provided a landing field beside his cabin on Bell Rock

Slope. Then you could steal an airplane, maybe, and get there with no exertion to yourself."

"Hauling stolen pelts with an airplane, eh? Well, that's one way to make the fur fly, ain't it?" Forge chuckled softly.

"Jokes," said the dark man with angry impatience. "All right, Forge. Stay here in town. Steal pennies from the pockets of drunk men and let the dollars go. Spring is here. Soon the snow will be melted, and then . . . If my own feet were not crippled so bad, I could pull a toboggan, a heavy one. Pull it from Bell Rock Slope over to Shannon's Landing. And be glad to get the thousand dollars the Irishman would pay me for furs."

"You'd have to get a toboggan first," Forge said.

"The Swede's is cached not a hundred yards from his deserted cabin—in the rocky crevice to the north. I tell you I've seen it there with my own eyes."

"It's a long, tough trail, Moccasin," Forge said.

"And you'd get tired. And thirsty for something besides snow water," said the smaller man bitterly.

"And then have to split, with you, the money Tim Shannon paid me for them furs . . . Thanks for showing me your hole card, Moccasin, but I haven't lost anything as far north as Bell Rock Slope. Maybe you can find somebody else to tackle that trip."

"Just be sure you *don't* tackle it—as soon as I'm on my way down to Whetstone," Moccasin said. "I'm entitled to some money out of those furs if they're sold. Remember that, Forge. And keep your mouth shut about this deal, even when your little brain is cooking in the fumes of rotgut whisky."

"Let's start the fumes by having a drink

on me right now," Forge said, rising.

"Drink alone." The dark man got up and hobbled out the door.

With slitted eyes Moose observed that exit, and watched Forge Alkire amble leisurely toward the bar. Minutes ticked by. Forge was having his third drink when the chair in which Moose had been slumping farther and farther to one side suddenly skidded and toppled its brawny occupant to the floor.

The bartender laughed as Moose, looking wildly about for a moment, rose from the untidy floor. The bartender said, "I'll make you a couch of pine needles to bed

down on next time. They'll seem more homelike to a moose, and be easier on the furniture."

"Don't let unkind remarks make you scowl like that, Moose," said Forge Alkire. "Come on and have a drink with me."

"I never get that thirsty," Moose answered in his deep, throaty voice. "Oh, I'm no angel, Mr. Alkire. But I haven't sunk clear to the bottom of the muckhole yet. I might gag on whisky bought with the kind of money you're packing lately."

"What's wrong with my money?" Forge said, his smile gone,



*It was only mute, sul-
len fury that drove
Moose on that last
five miles.*

"It come off a dead man that deserved something better than having his skull bashed in with a club," Moose said. "A kid that froze and starved and sweat while dragging a sick trapper, a Swede, across forty miles of snow and ice and rocks. What that stout-hearted kid did deserve was the purse the folks down at Chelnik took up for him. The three hundred dollars he lost—along with his life—when you cracked him over the head with your club. And this is the *second* time I've told you."

"I didn't do it," Forge said.

"I say you did," Moose said. "Are you calling me a liar, Alkire?"

"Well, I'm not calling you a liar, but—" Forge retreated.

"I wish you would," Moose told him. "I'd like to start twisting that red head off your neck. Just as a belated favor to a kid named Hugh Smith, or to the Swede trapper, Peterson, the man he saved." Moose turned and strode out of the saloon.

MOOSE didn't stride very far. He walked about three hundred yards and entered the back door of Lee Yun's poorly lighted little store at the edge of town. Lee Yun, engaged in making a bearclaw necklace, glanced up from his work and offered a rotund smile.

"No girl would be seen wearing a hideous looking thing like that you're making," Moose said. "Not even one of them girls up at Big Bertha's place."

"Perhaps not," said Lee Yun, unoffended. "And yet some man with whisky in his belly and money in his pocket might think some girl up at Big Bertha's place would like it as a present."

"I want my pack, Lee Yun," said Moose. "And some grub. Enough to run me four or five days. I'll pay you for it in a couple of weeks."

"You should apply for credit to those who aren't sure you're unworthy of trust," said the Chinaman affably. "Besides, you always have some money . . . somewhere. Or the equivalent."

"All right," Moose said impatiently. "I've got a man's ring I've been packing around for a couple of years. Here."

"A signet ring," said Lee Yun, squinting tilted eyes as he examined the article. "Sorry, Moose. While these small, en-

graved letters, 'H. S.' might indicate that this is a class ring, once worn by a high-school student, some suspicious person might think them to be initials."

"Initials?"

"Yes," said Lee Yun politely. "They could stand for Harold Spencer or Henry Snyder or Hugh Smith or Howard Stewart."

"What made you think of Hugh Smith?" Moose's tone was flat, harsh.

"Probably because I've heard that name repeated so much in the past few weeks," said Lee Yun. "Wasn't he the lad who saved the life of a Swede prospector; and then, after having been rewarded for his heroism—"

"Shut up. Stay shut up. And fork over some grub and my pack, Chinaman," said Moose Rabou.

"I wondered," said Lee Yun. "Now I wonder if you shouldn't drop that signet ring in some very, very deep canyon, Mr. Rabou? And so much suspicion has somehow been directed at Forge Alkire."

"You cheep one word to Forge or anybody else and I'll twist your head off, Chinaman," Moose said.

"Yes," replied Lee Yun. "I believe you would."

Moose purchased his supplies with a twenty dollar bill, said goodbye to Lee Yun; and knew that it would be unwise for him ever to enter the Chinaman's place of business again.

ALL that night Moose Rabou, a pack strapped to his able shoulders, trudged toward the mountains. Mountains thrusting their fangs into the star-bright sky. At midnight he stopped to rest beside a frozen stream where wild things, ever inclined to follow a water course, had engraved the snow with track patterns. Men had passed this way, too, recently. A charred log at the river's brink somehow reminded Moose of a man lying still in the snow. Moose took from his pocket a signet ring and tossed it quickly into a clump of dead buck-brush. Then he took a drink of whisky from a quart bottle and trudged on over white terrain that grew steeper with each succeeding mile.

At dawn he paused to rest again. He ate a can of salmon, studied a map drawn

on a piece of wrapping paper, and was on his way again. As the morning sun climbed higher, the temperature grew milder. Sweat beads dripped from the big man's shaggy head and brows. The weight of the pack began to oppress. Staunch legs began to ache. But the wayfarer plodded on across a deep valley, down into and up out of the next.

Another dawn was in the sky when Moose Rabou fought his way up a timbered slope from which jutted a huge rock shaped not unlike a bell. The big man hunched forward against a glacial wind, a biting wind that punished his face as relentlessly as he had punished his fatigue-tortured body to gain sight of the Swede's cabin, the roof of which was now in view. Moose had promised himself rest when he reached that cabin. Yet, exhausted as he was, he knew he would have no rest until he had located the pelts he had come to steal. And the toboggan.

After finding both, he lifted a half-empty quart bottle and said, "To the little stranger with the French accent and the moccasins. He knew what he was talking about . . . too near the wrong man." Moose drank deeply this time and lay down in his blankets. Hours went by and he didn't stir. Not until it was nearly dark.

The big man didn't harness himself to a pelt-laden toboggan and take his departure that night. It was snowing and blowing too hard. He waited until morning to begin the gruelling trip ahead. And, although much of it was downhill, a gruelling trip it was. One that taxed his physical powers to the utmost. Sometimes, when the going was uphill, Moose was down on all fours, straining and sweating like an overworked ox. Twice, to get up long hills, he had to split his load and make two trips.

The last part of the journey, the country between Brush River and Shannon's Landing, was the worst. It was rough country and there were big patches of snow-bare terrain around which the toboggan must detour. Moose ran out of whiskey, then out of grub. And nearly out of strength. It was mute, sullen fury that drove him on that last five miles; and, eventually, up to the back door of Tim Shannon's log building.

6—Northwest—Winter

SLEEP AS IT SNOWS

Eskimos, both men and women, are often caught in a blizzard, and are unable to find their way back to camp. Fortunately for them, they have never heard the white man's adage that, under such conditions, "you must keep moving; if you fall asleep, you will never wake in this world." Many white men have died, not because being lost in a blizzard is necessarily fatal, but because they used up their energy in moving about and keeping awake. They also worked up a perspiration, and their clothes became damp. Then, when they were so worn out that they could not keep awake, they dropped in their tracks, and froze to death.

The Eskimo, on the other hand, does not become panicky; with him, a blizzard is all in the day's work. He wears a caribou-skin parka (perhaps two of them) with a hood. The sleeves are large enough to permit the arms to be withdrawn, and the ends of the sleeves are then tucked into the wearer's belt. He places his mittens on the snow to insulate him against the cold, folds his arms across his chest, and sits down. With his back to the wind, and his elbows on his knees, he leans forward and sleeps until daylight comes—or the storm blows itself out—and he can get his bearings.

In spite of his skin clothing, an Eskimo, under the above conditions, becomes chilled at intervals. This wakes him up, and he gets to his feet and walks about to relieve the stiffness that results from sitting in a cramped position. He stamps in the snow to restore the circulation of the blood. In other words, the Eskimo obeys three fundamental principles: Don't use up your energy; keep your clothing dry; and get as much sleep as you can.

The rapping of big knuckles against his bolted door summoned bald, paunchy Tim Shannon at nine o'clock that night. Looking over his brawny visitor from head to foot, Shannon said, "I thought it was reindeer that pulled sleighs, not moose. Of all the mud and muck. Where have you come from, big feller?"

"Never mind that," Moose said. "I'm here to sell furs. Look 'em over."

"That toboggan," Shannon began. And stopped. Then, shrewdly, he added, "Are you selling these furs for a Swede trapper named Peterson? The Swede that got sick out in the wilds and was saved by—"

"I never seen Peterson in my life," Moose cut in. "I'm selling these pelts for myself. And you're buying 'em now, Irishman, if you know what's good for you."

"Getting pelts at half what they're

worth is always what's good for a fur dealer," Shannon said coldly.

Moose Rabou didn't explode at that. In fact, he didn't hear what Shannon was saying. Moose, groggy with weariness, was watching two men walking into the panel of lamplight shafting from the door. One was a dark little man who hobbled along in moccasins. The other was gangling, redheaded Forge Alkire.

Alkire said, "It seems like you wasn't asleep in the saloon the other day when Moccasin here was talking to me, Moose. I was about half afraid you was when you fell off that chair." Forge nodded at his smaller companion and went on, "He'll sell them pelts at full price, Moose. Or bash your head in with that club he's packing."

MOOSE was looking intently at that club, and listening to the moccasin-ned man say, "You shouldn't have kept accusing Forge here of killing Hugh Smith with a club, Rabou. Nobody but you seemed to know what young Smith was killed with. But we've found out. We found this club in a bunch of brush down by Chelnik—not far from where Hugh Smith was killed. It had dried blood and a few hairs on it."

"Good," Moose said lightly. "Now all you've got to do is find out who swung the club—if you want to ape Hugh Smith by being noble. And collect a reward like he did."

"Because you tried covering moose tracks by pointing suspicion at me, I've helped to find out," Forge said. "And I've already collected my reward."

"What?" Moose demanded.

"You've proved to me, better than all the lectures in the world could, that a man shouldn't try to live by his wits—when he's only half-equipped for the venture," Forge said. "He gets more and more desperate as time goes on. And finally he does what you did. He commits murder."

"So you're calling me a half-witted murdered, are you, Alkire?"

"That's right," Forge said. "But thanks for changing my ways."

"And for making that long, hard trip way up to Bell Rock Slope, a place you'd never have found without a map to guide you," said Moccasin. "A map I drew for young Hugh Smith when he was going up there to get the pelts that you've dragged down here."

"What's happened to your French accent?" Moose rumbled.

"That was put on for an eavesdropper in a saloon," was the reply. "You see, Mr. Rabou, they've been calling me Moccasin just since I froze my feet so bad—when young Smith was getting me to town. I'm really a Swede. Not one of the taffy-haired ones. Olaf Peterson's the name."

It was a tide of fury that swept brawny Moose Rabou toward the crippled speaker. But the spring had gone from the attacker's heavy, leaden legs. His big body was numb with fatigue, exhausted by the torturing weariness that came of being driven too hard by the lashing whip of greed.

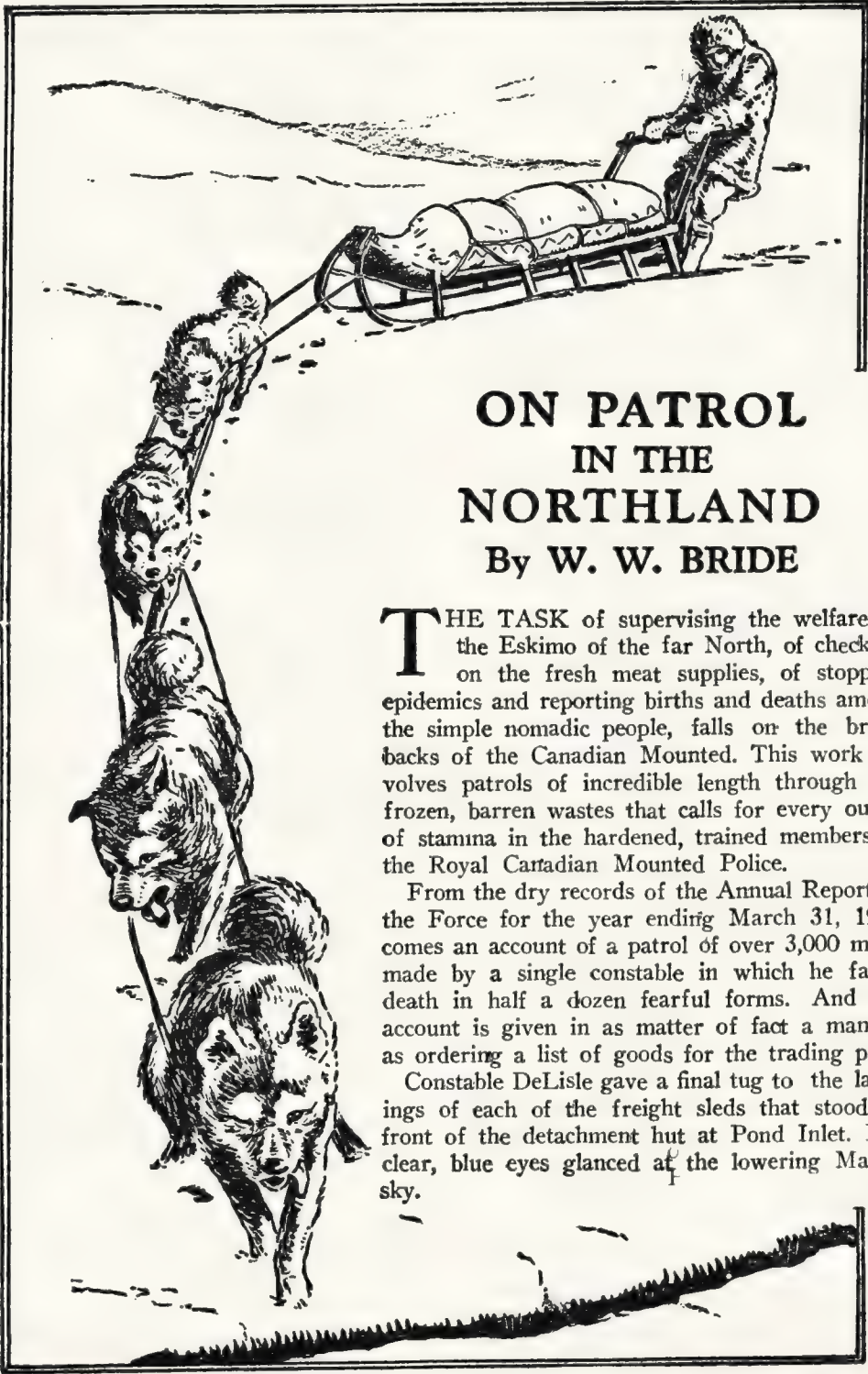
Too slowly Moose Rabou's arms tried to take Olaf Peterson in their crushing grasp.

The little Swede, handicapped as he was by moccasin-ned feet which had been badly frozen, didn't have much trouble in side-stepping that attack. And landing a stunning blow on his assailant's head with the same club that had killed Hugh Smith.

Rabou toppled to the earth. He tried desperately to rise. He couldn't. He was being held down. His mud-smeared pockets were being searched. And Olaf Peterson was saying, "That's the map I drew for Hugh Smith, all right, Forge."

Paunchy Tim Shannon, who didn't know his place had been watched all day and evening—and who would have bought stolen furs for half price, blinked owlish eyes and said pensively, "Maybe you're right, Forge. Maybe some of us *should* change our ways. And before somebody trumps our noggin with a club."

An exciting, true account of a perilous 3,000-mile patrol by a Constable of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police whose constant companion was Death . . . trailing him beneath the bleak, grey Arctic skies.



ON PATROL IN THE NORTHLAND

By W. W. BRIDE

THE TASK of supervising the welfare of the Eskimo of the far North, of checking on the fresh meat supplies, of stopping epidemics and reporting births and deaths among the simple nomadic people, falls on the broad backs of the Canadian Mounted. This work involves patrols of incredible length through the frozen, barren wastes that calls for every ounce of stamina in the hardened, trained members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

From the dry records of the Annual Report of the Force for the year ending March 31, 1945 comes an account of a patrol of over 3,000 miles made by a single constable in which he faced death in half a dozen fearful forms. And the account is given in as matter of fact a manner as ordering a list of goods for the trading post.

Constable DeLisle gave a final tug to the lashings of each of the freight sleds that stood in front of the detachment hut at Pond Inlet. His clear, blue eyes glanced at the lowering March sky.

"There's weather coming I don't like," he remarked curtly to Angnatsiak, the Eskimo driver who stood grinning beside one of the sleds piled high with goods and equipment. Each of the sleds held a load of thirteen hundred pounds. Over a quarter of each load was food for the strings of huskies who lay in the snow or squatted on their haunches, tongues lolling out of red mouths.

Thirty-five of the great, deep-chested animals would eat a lot of fish and whale meat, DeLisle figured when he made up the loads. On a patrol of this calibre into the frozen, bleak uninhabited iceland in sub-zero weather, every ounce counted, every item in the ton of supplies and equipment had to be considered carefully. A miscalculation, a trivial oversight, a detail considered too petty to bother with could easily be an invitation to the ever-present Death that hovered in the bleak grey skies of the Arctic.

DeLisle watched with approval as he saw Ehaksak, the other driver, running his mittened hand along the seal hide traces of his team, peering at each joint for frayed spots.

There were a couple of young huskies in the seventeen that made up the team of his sled who loved to chew the traces while waiting.

At a sign from the constable the drivers shouted their guttural commands, cracked the lashes and urged the dogs to their feet. The teams spread out fanwise and the sleds moved off on whalebone runners, heavily coated with ice. Down the shore they dashed at breakneck speed and swung out onto the sea ice on the first leg of the journey.

Murder, even in the frozen Northland, never goes unpunished, and a murder was the chief purpose of Constable DeLisle's expedition. Word had been brought by a trader from Fort Ross on Boothia Peninsula of the shooting affray among the Eskimos of the district. Since the ice always goes out early on Prince Regent Inlet, separating the two points, there was the choice of making an immediate, speedy dash or of waiting until the fall free-up. By that time the tribes would have wandered to some other inaccessible spot and the witnesses scattered. DeLisle chose the former plan.

On the sea ice of Eclipse Sound the party made good time but just as the constable began to glance around for a suitable campsite, the leading driver raised his arm and pointed to one side. A solid wall of grey fog, shot with streaks and whirls of white, rolled toward them. DeLisle hardly had time to pull his hood more tightly around his face before even the teams were blotted out in a blanket of stinging, biting particles of ice and snow that whirled and twisted in the gale that threatened to swing the sleds right around. The dogs hunched their shoulders and dug numbed feet into the ice and scrambled after the drivers for the protection of the shore line.

Ehaksak seized his harpoon and thrust the handle deep into the thick snow of the shore. He nodded and seized his snow-knife and began the task of cutting blocks of snow for the shelter for the night. The speed with which the two Eskimos threw up a sound, solid snow-house was only equalled by the speed with which the huskies gulped the frozen fish DeLisle tossed to them.

The men crouched inside their clammy shelter and swalled their frugal meal of beans heated over a Primus stove, and swallowed gulps of black tea.

THE constable made some effort to dry the layers of socks and the heavy mittens that were saturated with perspiration. But in the 45 below zero weather the clinging dampness refused to move. The men fell into a fitful sleep in the fog-filled igloo that gave the seal oil light a weird and eerie glow.

The drift storm lasted for the next five days. For day after day, the Mountie trudged along beside the sled with nothing more to look at than the ice at his feet and the dogs ahead. They travelled in a little world of their own: a dull, meaningless world with the air filled with a myriad of stinging insects. The temperature dropped steadily until the camps came to be a nightmarish episode to be endured along with the day's agonies. The bitter cold seeped through all clothing, filtered in through the layers of the sleeping bags and made morning, with its activity and exertion, a blessed relief.

On the eighth day the patrol reached

the Hudson's Bay Post at Arctic River on Admiralty Inlet. They had covered two hundred and forty miles in eight days and the dogs were beginning to show signs of weakening. Routine duties of checking the number of Eskimos at the post and of investigating such occurrences as the death of two of the natives kept the patrol at the post for the next two days.

Two of the mightiest hunters of the tribe had been found frozen to death on the bleak stretches of the Inlet a short time previously. Tracks showed clearly that the men had been driven from their igloo by a ravenous bear that had burst in on them in search of the seal they had cached. Their weapons and clothing and tools still inside the snow hut, the men had burrowed into the snow in an effort to maintain a spark of life until the mammoth beast had left. Death had overcome them.

From Arctic Bay the route lay across the frigid glacial wastes of Brodeur Peninsula where the path was new and untried and the rocks lay bare and exposed to the whining blasts that whipped the dry snow into gusty billows. The search for suitable snow to make snow shelters became a major task. Snow that lies in layers will not yield a good block and there has been more than one tyro smothered under heap of heavy blocks when his igloo collapsed.

Constable DeLisle, in the lead, glanced back through the blinding drift and failed to see the shadowy shapes of the struggling dogs of Ehaksak. He slowed his pace and waited for the sled to appear. Husky teams will follow a previous sled mark with unerring skill, rarely swinging off the trail unless for a good reason. There was no sign of the team. In vain the Mountie peered through his frost-rimmed eyes and tried to shield his face with his heavy mitten to get a better view. With a muttered curse he headed back for the lost sled.

He came upon the team lying on their bellies in the snow while Ehaksak squatted beside the sled. In the shrieking wind in the half-light, speech was difficult. The driver pointed to the sled. The runners had become de-iced on the jagged rocks and the whalebone was all but worn through. It dragged and made slow trav-

elling. Nothing for it but to re-ice the runner. The load was unleashed and lifted off and the sled turned over. In the shelter of the komatik the Primus stove heated snow and then this was quickly poured along the runner, freezing instantly.

Across that trackless wilderness, this task had to be performed several times a day and at other times the sleds had to be bulled by brute strength over the dry, barren spots. This arduous part of the journey took the party five days.

It was a relief to both men and dogs when they plummeted down the last descent and sped out on the glare salt ice of Prince Regent Inlet. For the first day the going was good. The faces of the drivers, framed in their parkas showed their delight in getting away from the land horror of the Peninsula.

"More snow coming," warned DeLisle as they made camp the first night. As he tossed the dogs their meal he noticed that the pile was getting dangerously low, but he consoled himself with the thought that on the Inlet they would meet with some game.

The following morning the gale still blew the drift across the ice and the cold was so intense that even the dogs refused to rouse. Both Eskimos waded into the snow-covered balls of fur with lash and harpoon handle and finally lined them up for the start. The visibility was poor. A black curtain of vapor seemed to hang over the entire Inlet. DeLisle had seen this before on sea ice and knew that it meant one thing—open water. And in the blinding vapors they drove in there was a grave chance that they would plunge into an air hole or an open pit in the ice.

A shout from Angnatsiak, much waving of the arms and pointing at the ground.

"Rough ice. Finish dog pretty soon," was his guttural comment. The sea ice had been swept almost bare of loose snow and the surface was not the smooth glare ice of the sheltered coast. It was covered with myriads of tiny pinnacles each as sharp as a needle and just as strong. The dogs' feet were already bleeding badly and some of them limping. Without wasting any time, the men set to work fashioning shoes of seal hide for the dogs.

But the condition of the dogs was not

the main worry that caused Constable DeLisle to peer into the encircling gloom with weary, anxious eyes. The entire plain of ice seemed to be as devoid of game as a lake of salt. Without a kill of some kind, there would not be enough dog food to last until Fort Ross was reached. It had been a sad blow when the post manager at Arctic Bay had pointed to the small stock of frozen fish and remarked "That's all we have until the hunters get back."

ONE morning, as the drivers struggled to get the weakened dogs to their feet, Ehaksak pointed to his lead dog, "Peluk! Finished."

DeLisle examined the great brute. He was dead and there seemed to be no obvious reason. Fish-bone, exhaustion, one of a dozen probable reasons. Before the patrol made camp that night two of the dogs of Angnatsiak's team dropped from exhaustion and lay panting in the snow. DeLisle ordered camp and worked over the spent animals forcing hot food down their gaping throats. The brutes were beyond all help and in a matter of minutes were stark, frozen corpses.

It was a sullen, depressed group that grudgingly broke camp the next morning. The unwilling dogs were whipped into action and again the party headed into the limitless expanse of snow and ice unbroken by any trail or marking. Suddenly the dogs let out a series of short yelps and plunged against the traces like mad things. More than half wild and all of them with a strain of wolf ancestry not far removed, they slipped into the role of a wolf pack with a shake of the head and the lifting of the scruff.

DeLisle raced ahead. What had got into the animals? Then he saw the broad, sweeping track of a polar bear. The man became as excited as the dogs and urged them on at breakneck speed as his keen eyes sought out the huge bulk of the animal ahead. For over two hours the dogs raced madly over the jagged uneven ice that threatened to careen the equipment in a smashed, jumbled wreck at any instant.

At a sign from the constable the driver slipped in amongst the traces of the teams and slipped them free. The thirty odd

animals sped across the ice like fast, silent greyhounds and surrounded the bear. They began a vicious attack, singly and in groups. By the time the drivers and DeLisle arrived the bear stood at bay in a maze of up-ended ice, the ground around spotted with blood.

"We'll have to get those dogs off," the constable warned the men, "or there'll not be a bone left for us."

THE Eskimos began the task of snapping the traces on to the dogs at the edge of the pack. As the attackers thinned out, the bear made a move to run again. In a flash, DeLisle brought his rifle to his shoulder. The crack of the shot was lost in the fierce snarling of the dogs. The monstrous bear tumbled to its side as the dogs rushed in, burying their fangs in its side. Angnatsiak and Ehaksak hurled themselves on the dogs, armed with harpoon and lash, and drove the brutes off. Ehaksak started cutting the meat into chunks and tossing them to DeLisle who stowed them in the sled. Angnatsiak was waging a losing battle with the dogs. They swept over him in a wave of gaunt, bare-fanged, ravenous beasts and fell on the carcass and in a matter of minutes ripped the kill to bits.

When the party reached the narrow passage between Somerset Island and the Boothia Peninsula, they were confronted by a towering mass of ice peaks, the Pressure Barrier. Almost at the same instant as they sighted the towering peaks, the leading sled dogs veered sharply off and scrambled madly to regain their footing. The ice gaped in a wide crevasse before them. While the panting dogs squatted on their haunches, the men examined the deep, jagged crack and considered their next move. DeLisle was aware that from this point on the entire surface of the ice would be literally honey-combed with such chasms across which the dogs, sledges and equipment would have to be conveyed in some manner.

The constable judged the distance of the crevasse across and with a short run made a flying leap, landing on all fours on the other side. The drivers were quick to grasp his intention and began the task of unloading the sleds. Piece by piece, the loads were tossed across to the Mountie.

Then the lightened sleds were eased across the treacherous edges of the chasm and, with the help of Ehaksak who had scrambled across, DeLisle hauled them across to the ice on the other side.

One by one, the dogs were swung across the crevasse. During the next three days the going was slow and rough. The dogs, hauling the thousand pound sledges, had been able to make thirty miles a day under good conditions, but these days the patrol considered ten miles a good day. In places the men went ahead with their snow knives and axes and hacked a passageway between the towering blocks of ice to allow room for the sleds.

On the evening of April 6th, fifteen days after leaving Arctic Bay the worn and haggard men strode in to Fort Ross, the most difficult part of the trip behind them.

Here, again, dog food was scarce and the constable, the Eskimo and helpers from the Fort spent the next few days seal hunting on the floe-ice.

INQUIRIES as to the murder revealed that the Nesilingmiut tribe living in their camping grounds on the East coast of Boothia Peninsula, a race of people but little removed from the cavemen, had held one of their primitive dances and feasts during which Kookieyout had been killed.

Accompanied by an interpreter, Constable DeLisle headed north again. As the team swung into the cluster of igloos and shacks that made up the settlement, there was not a soul to be seen. Picking out the largest of the snow houses, the Mountie lifted the flap and crawled through the snow entrance. In the smoky, fetid atmosphere of the igloo at least a dozen of the elders of the tribe sat on the hide-covered snow ledges around the ice walls. They grinned in friendly greeting, their straggly hair falling over their beady darting eyes. True Troglodytes of another age.

In the gloomy light of the seal oil lamp, DeLisle took down the disjointed story of the shooting. The murderess, Mitkayout, in her half shy, half bold manner freely told of the killing of her husband and offered to lead the officer to the body. Almost the entire tribe turned out to make

WOLF-BAIT

A trapper in the Great Bear Lake region used to fish through the ice in winter. He had a dog-team, and the leader was so well trained that he would shuttle back and forth between the lake and the trapper's cabin (where the man's wife unloaded the sled) without a driver. One day the trapper was amazed to see a white wolf sneak up behind the sled and steal several fish without molesting the dogs. Having a hunch that the wolf would repeat the trick on the next trip to the cabin, the trapper hid himself in the sled, and the dogs started off to the cabin. When the wolf came within range, he shot it. The wolf proved to be a female; that is why it did not attack the dogs.

the trip to the spot where the body had been cached on the top of a hill.

Placed in the rough box brought from Fort Ross and lashed onto a sled, the body was ready for the return journey. DeLisle happened to glance back from his position near the team of his own sled. He was amazed to see the coffin covered with a laughing, shouting group of Eskimo all intent on getting a last ride down the hill. Even as he shouted, the sled started off, careening over the rough ice like a live thing, the riders shrieking their glee as they sped across the sea ice at the bottom of the hill.

Mitkayout and the necessary witnesses were all held at the Fort awaiting the arrival of the supply ship with the judicial officials for the trial. But the constable was doomed for further disappointment. Because of the lateness of the season and the strong ice in the Inlet, the ship was not able to reach the Post which was running dangerously low on supplies. For the summer months the Eskimos and the Mountie hunted and helped stock the Post for the coming winter. Then word reached Fort Ross that the officer in charge of the Pond Inlet detachment had taken the supply ship out because of illness. This meant that Constable DeLisle should make all haste to take over the Post there.

A start on the return journey was made on October 19th on the first leg of the two thousand mile trek back to the starting point. But because the ice in Prince Regent Inlet would not be solidly frozen until late in February, the entire bay would have to be circled. This meant a trek as far south as the Arctic Circle, to

Repulse Bay and then up the other side of the expanse of water.

The two drivers and the dogs had been sent back before the break up and thus DeLisle had employed the services of old Oojuk and his team of huskies for the return trip. Excerpts from the diary that the indefatigable officer kept en route reveal some of the difficulties they faced.

Nov. 3, 1943:

Waited for drift to abate but no luck so left anyway. In some places the snow was so deep that we seemed in danger of going under. Froze my nose today.

In the face of the storms the travelling was slower than expected and the supplies became dangerously low.

Nov. 22, 1943:

Ate last of beans, which leaves us with 13 lbs. biscuits, 5 lbs. sugar, 3 lbs. rolled oats.

That night the travellers sat in their snow hut and munched dry biscuits and swallowed the last of their tea. DeLisle frowned as he recalled the scarcity of game tracks in the district. Unless something turned up in the morning, they would have to tighten their belts. And Repulse Bay was still many sleeps away, according to old Oojuk.

It was not until the evening of the next day that the patrol fell in with a hunting party of Eskimos who had a plentiful supply of fish and seal blubber. With supplies replenished for a time, DeLisle pushed on with all speed. During the next few days they were lucky enough to shoot game to keep them going.

Dec. 14, 1943:

Mitts and socks still wet. Decided against making camp and off again by moonlight. Ran ahead of the dogs as incentive. We crossed the Rae Isthmus without sleeping despite the fact that we have only nine dogs.

This last fling brought the party into Repulse Bay at the foot of the Inlet where for the first time they were able to get dry clothing and adequate supplies for the rest of the journey north.

Grimly, Constable DeLisle seized the bars of the light sledge and headed into the teeth of the storm. His frost-rimmed eyes stared at the sleet that whirled around the dogs.

This was the last lap of the trip and Pond Inlet was not far off. The bitter cold became so severe that there was hardly a moment of the day that he was not holding a snow-covered mitt to some part of his face that was frozen. Even speaking through his chapped and raw lips was agony. With sudden decision he swung the team off the sea ice and toward the shore.

He and his guide, Tonnick, began the task of making the igloo.

The dogs curled in the snow entrance and the men lay on the snow benches covered with hides. They waited for the storm to abate. From time to time DeLisle would knock a block from the roof of the igloo and peer at the murky darkness above, listening to the shriek of the wind as it whipped snow around the hut. Instead of decreasing, the storm became worse and the drifts piled higher. For two days the men squatted in the clammy shelter of their igloo on Lancaster Sound. Then the Mountie decided to make the start of the last lap of the journey anyway.

The dogs were dug out, roused and harnessed, the sled loaded and once again they trudged through the whirling snow. Weak, fatigued and frost-bitten the patrol struggled in to Pond Inlet. It was March 17, 1944. Five days over a year since they left. A routine patrol successfully completed.

Two days later the ice went out of Lancaster Sound, taking with it the abandoned igloo in which the men had sat.



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Flame Of The Windigo Wild

By CURTIS BISHOP



The wily ambuscades of fur thieves; the bleak, howling blizzards; the treacherous pitfalls of the wild Sanokota country—all these hazards of the trail Corporal Slater Martin gladly preferred to face rather than one day at the Post under the ruthless, power-mad C.O.



CORPORAL SLATER MARTIN of the Royal Mounted hastily pitched camp at the headquarters of Miquota Creek. He put water to boil over a slow aspen fire, sliced bacon and opened a container of beans; then, while the meat was sizzling, he carefully wiped his snow-shoes free of slush and hung them in the branches overhead.

For five years Corporal Martin had been making such solitary camps in the Sanokota country and no white man could better safeguard his own comfort and security. The black bushes behind him were both a windbreak and a convenient source of wood if a sudden blizzard struck. Any furtive assailant would have to ap-

proach his sleeping bag from the lee side and would have to leap across the fire to strike at the sleeping man. Though his present assignment was routine and no ambush was expected, Corporal Martin had automatically prepared against such a sneak attack.

Corporal Martin was not tired. On routine inspection trips a Redcoat purposely took a deliberate gait and left a trail easy to follow. No one man could visit each cluster of Cree lodges and every trapper's cabin. But, if his pace was slow, the word would fly ahead that a scarlet-jacketed man was passing through and, if help was needed or if there were abuses to be charged, the Corporal's trail was

plainly visible and the Redcoat easy to overtake at his next camp.

Thus Martin was not shocked to hear the faint yapping of dogs, then the crunching of steel runners tearing through the soft crust of this season's first north country snow. He tossed faggots onto his fire to make it blaze high and then waited calmly beside it until the sled swung around the bushes and the huskies were pulled to a quivering grateful halt.

Then, as he recognized the slight furl-clad figure behind the sled, Corporal Martin leaped forward.

"Beth!" he shouted. "What are you doing here?"

Without thinking he held out his arms as the girl walked stiffly toward him. For a moment she rested her weight against him, her head on his shoulder, her body shaking. Then she stepped away.

"You might offer a tired girl some tea and bacon, Corporal," she reproved him with a faint smile.

He quickly moved to obey. Beth Davidson crouched at the fire and threw back the hood of her parka with a weary gesture.

"I was beginning to think I'd never catch up with you," she sighed.

Martin handed her a cup of scalding tea. "Drink this," he advised, "and then tell me all about it."

He knew that nothing trivial had inspired Beth Davidson's pursuit of him through this northern expanse of the Sanokota country. The full menace of the northern winter had not struck yet, but it was due any time.

She sipped her tea slowly and took a few bits of bacon, beans and bannock. Then she said in a low voice:

"I may have done wrong to come to you, Slater."

IT was not often she called him by his first name. Usually her address of him was no more informal than "Corporal" instead of "Corporal Martin." But, though shy with women, particularly this one, Slater Martin had not been altogether blind to the sometimes mocking note of her formal way with him. He knew, and was thrilled by it, that her interest in him was more than merely north country hospitality whenever his

tour of duty necessitated a call at Badger Davidson's isolated trading post. He knew, too, that Beth was very well aware that he made such calls at the slightest pretext.

"You did right," he assured her. "Whatever it is, I want to help you."

"All right," Beth nodded. She lowered her head a moment, then her gaze met his evenly. "Dad was arrested last night, Slater."

"What for?" demanded the Corporal, unable to believe her. Badger Davidson was known as a stubborn man but an honest one.

She made a clicking sound. "For buying poisoned furs," she said tersely. Then, answering his unspoken question: "Inspector Blackmon did it himself."

Corporal Martin stared at her, for the moment speechless. A bulletin from headquarters had reported the arrival of poisoned pelts down the river and had informed Inspector Louis Blackmon that the furs had been traced to the Sanokota territory.

But Badger Davidson was the last trader Martin would have suspicioned of buying poisoned pelts.

"There were some poisoned furs in Dad's last shipment downstream," Beth went on in a dull voice. "Inspector Blackmon searched the warehouse. There was another bale of them."

"But your father trades only with Crees," objected Martin, "and the Crees—"

"Blue Moon was arrested, too," Beth informed him through trembling lips.

"Not Blue Moon!"

She nodded.

Martin's lips tightened. The Corporal had grown up in the Sanokota country. He and Blue Moon, a young Cree chieftain, had been playmates as boys. Martin knew there was no more honorable man in the entire north country than the strapping young Indian who had all of the dignity and pride of his fathers. But yet, even as Slater Martin tried to assure Beth of the innocence of her father and Blue Moon, he was worried. Blue Moon had not stoically accepted the white man's domination as had most of the other red men in the North. Blue Moon had consented to attend a white man's school,

and had graduated from it, but he had returned to his native woods with the firm conviction that his people had been misused by the white men.

As yet Blue Moon had staged no physical revolt but Corporal Martin had observed with concern the mounting resentment Blue Moon displayed toward white traders, and toward Inspector Blackmon of the Mounted. Badger Davidson had been disgruntled for some time also, resenting the Force's failure to check the overbearing policies of Cole Pullman, superintendent of the Sanokota Fur Company.

It was Pullman whom Blue Moon and Badger Davidson charged with violating all of the laws, unwritten and otherwise, of the fur country.

"Does your father deny buying the furs?" Slater asked.

"Of course," she answered quickly.

"And Blue Moon?"

"I didn't see him. The Inspector had arrested him before reaching our post."

"The bale of poisoned furs the Inspector found in the warehouse . . . how did they get there?"

"Dad doesn't know," Beth sighed. "Nor do I."

He nodded at the latter assurance. Beth transacted almost as much of the post's business as her father.

"Try to remember who came to the post since the last shipment."

"Blue Moon, of course, and his sister, and a dozen other Crees. We had a rush all week . . . buying up supplies before the freeze."

"None of Pullman's trappers?" Martin demanded.

"Slater, you don't think——!" Beth protested. She did not share her father's hatred of swarthy Cole Pullman. In fact, fur country gossip hinted that the Sanokota superintendent had already left the tectiturn Corporal Martin far behind in the chase for Beth Davidson's hand.

"I merely asked," shrugged the Corporal.

"There were two," Beth admitted after a moment. "But they only bought tobacco."

"Who were they?"

"Jinx Duval and Sweater Stone."

Martin nodded. He knew both of them. Duval and Stone, with a record behind

them of mistreating Indian women. But skilled trappers.

"How long did Duval and Stone stay?"

"An hour perhaps," recalled Beth. "They were waiting for the boat, the Sanokota' boat."

"Packs with them?"

"Yes."

"Good catches?"

"Yes."

AFTER a moment Beth said slowly: "Slater, I don't believe Pullman had anything to do with this. He's a hard trader—he has just about driven Dad to the wall—but I've never known him to be crooked."

"I'm only trying to fit everything together," Martin answered a little crisply. "Your father didn't accept the poisoned pelts from Blue Moon. You're sure of that, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course. You know Dad better than——"

"Then somebody must have slipped the pelts into your warehouse," the Corporal interrupted.

"Somebody must have slipped poisoned furs into your father's shipment downriver. I'm accusing Pullman of nothing . . . until I have the proof."

For a moment Beth was silent. Then she murmured, "I'm sorry, Slater. I know you'll help all you can."

"Of course I will," he assured her.

It might have been the moment for Corporal Slater Martin to add physical reassurance to his verbal support. There was a tear glistening in Beth's eye as she studied him across the firelight. Martin saw the tear, but he turned away.

"You need a cup of tea," he mumbled uncertainly.

"Yes," she agreed, "that would be nice."

Martin did not speak again for a long time.

Both stared into the fire. Then Slater said as he tossed another aspen log on the blaze:

"I can cut my trip short and go in tomorrow. I'll ask the Inspector to put me on the case."

But he was saying that only to make Beth feel better. He knew better than to expect any cooperation from Louis Blackmon.

II

LOUIS BLACKMON'S face showed evidence of dissipation. He was actually not at ease before the grim Corporal Slater Martin. Slater had made his request in writing that he be assigned to the investigation of the poisoned furs found inside Badger Davidson's warehouse. Blackmon fingered the request as he talked.

"I see no reason to continue the investigation, Corporal," he stated. "The pelts were in Davidson's warehouse. By Davidson's own testimony, he had bought all of the furs in his warehouse from Blue Moon. Blue Moon does all of the trading for his tribe and while another Cree may have actually done the baiting with strychnine, Blue Moon is guilty of conspiracy nevertheless."

Slater nodded. It was quite true that Blue Moon, returning from a white man's school and turning his back upon the white man's ways, did do all of the trading for his clan. Blue Moon had found that those Crees selling their furs to the Sanokota Company had been deceived both as to the quality of their pelts and the current market values. The Sanokota had lost nearly all of its Cree trade at Blue Moon's instigation. Cole Pullman, both in retaliation and in protection of his company's investment, had brought in white trappers and the newcomers had forced their way into the Cree country without interference from Inspector Blackmon, though it was as much the Royal Mounted's duty to protect the red men as it was to control them.

Corporal Martin had pointed this out in written reports and recommendations, but the Inspector had ignored them. James Alexander, Blackmon's predecessor, had valued Martin's opinion on relations with the Crees; the Indians trusted the lean, soft-spoken corporal who had played among their tepees as a boy. Not so Blackmon, who had never been to the Sanokota country until his appointment as inspector.

The new commander was a product of the Royal Mounted's training school, not of the uncharted frontiers. Except for his lack of formal education, Slater Martin would have been promoted into Alexan-

der's job. But headquarters had been reluctant to put an unschooled man like Martin in such a position of trust and responsibility.

For a time Blackmon's wife had lived with him at Sanokota. All others at the post had breathed a sigh of relief when she had left six months before, apparently separating from her husband. Mona Blackmon, a pretty blonde woman in her pettish way, had not been content for a single day with her husband's new assignment. In an effort to satisfy her the Inspector had remodeled their quarters, partly with his own funds, and had permitted the post to be used for gala social affairs, for which the rich Sanokota Fur Company paid. And it was no secret that Cole Pullman had given costly presents to the Inspector's blonde wife.

"That is true, sir," Martin admitted, choosing his words carefully. "But the evidence against both is circumstantial."

"Hardly," grunted the Inspector. "Possession of poisoned furs is a crime within itself. Davidson's testimony indicts Blue Moon."

"May I inspect the furs, Inspector, and interview the prisoners?"

Martin's request was made in a calm even voice. But such were not his feelings. He had promised Beth he would help her, but he was not surprised to find Inspector Blackmon determined to consider the case closed, and to send both prisoners on to headquarters for a formal trial with no further investigation. Whether or not he realized it, and it was unbelievable that any man could be so naive, Lewis Blackmon had become Cole Pullman's man.

Certainly the Sanokota Fur Company stood to profit financially by the imprisonment of Badger Davidson and Blue Moon.

Blackmon glared at the Corporal.

"Aren't you letting your personal feelings influence your duty?" he snapped.

It was all Slater Martin could do to restrain himself.

"I hope not, sir," the Corporal answered cautiously. Then he could not resist adding:

"My record, sir, is not one of personal prejudice."

"Your record is a good one," Blackmon

conceded frostily. "See that you keep it so by not going beyond the authority of your assignments."

With that warning the Inspection motioned that the interview was over.

SLATER Martin walked stiffly out of Blackmon's office. He could not be certain at this moment of the innocence of Davidson and Blue Moon, but he could be sure that Blackmon would accept the surface evidence as final without any effort to ascertain the true facts.

The tall lean Corporal walked slowly toward the river front, grappling with his emotions. For a year now he had these repeated temptations to resign from the Mounted and return to trapping. Blackmon was enough to make any man want to shed the scarlet jacket.

Then a voice from behind him called out his name and Slater turned to see Pale Flower running toward him. The Indian girl was Blue Moon's sister. Like the young Cree chieftain, she had been educated at the reservation academy. Unlike her brother, she had not returned to the lodges and ways of her fathers. She was wearing a gaily-colored blouse and full skirt as she came toward Martin, wearing them as becomingly and as naturally as if born to them. Tasteful rouge and powder added to her dusk beauty. Pale Flower was a pretty Indian girl who could employ the white woman's guiles to increase her charm.

"Slater," she said, speaking without a trace of an accent, "Blue Moon asks that you come to see him."

Martin nodded as he looked toward the sturdy log barracks which served the post as a temporary jail. "I know it. I'll try to."

He didn't want to volunteer the excuse that Blackmon had forbidden him to interfere in the case.

"Why are they doing this to Blue Moon, Slater?"

"I don't know, Pale Flower," Martin answered with the same evasiveness. He could not renounce an inspector of the Mounted even to this Cree girl whom he had known since childhood. Above anything else the Mounted must command the respect of the Indians. There were so few of the Redcoats, so many of the red

men. Let one Mounted officer display inefficiency or unfairness and the prestige of the entire Force suffered.

"They haven't convicted them yet," he added, with a reassurance in his tone that he did not feel.

Pale Flower stared across the river at the imposing headquarters of the Sanokota Fur Company. Here was the company's main warehouse, a two-story stone structure, with the residences of company offices clustered around it in stockade fashion. Three fur boats rode at anchor alongside the stone wharf. Cole Pullman had done well in these two years as superintendent of the Sanokota.

"It is *his* fault," the Indian girl murmured, undisguised bitterness in her voice. "Everything that Cole Pullman wants in this country, he gets."

Slater did not answer. Pale Flower's dark eyes studied him a moment before she added: "Even the woman you want for your own, Corporal Martin."

There was scorn in her voice, and reproach. Martin's lips tightened. He was not blind to Pale Flower's feeling for him. In their younger days it had meant nothing: Pale Flower's own father had teased her about it. But now Pale Flower was twenty years of age and should be choosing a husband. As long as she was employed at the post and clung so tenaciously to the habits and dress of the white people, she could not marry a Cree chieftain. Her brother, the proud, defiant Blue Moon, would not permit a union with a Cree of lesser rank. Thus, so the gossip ran, Pale Flower must be hoping to marry a white man, and Corporal Slater Martin was the logical prospect.

"Did you know that she is a guest in his lodge, Corporal Martin?" the girl demanded.

"Of course," snapped Martin. The Sanokota entertained all white visitors as a matter of policy. It was not the first time that Beth Davidson had occupied one of the fur company's lodges while visiting at the post. There was, indeed, no other place to stay.

She caught his arm. "I'm sorry, Slater," she apologized, now meek and regretful.

Martin patted her hand. "Forget it," he grinned. He could never resist her

when she was like this. As a girl, a childhood playmate, she was very close to him, and always would be. But as a woman she did not appeal to him in the way that she wished to affect him.

"CAN'T we walk along the river and talk?" asked Pale Flower. "There must be something we can do, Slater."

He nodded. Perhaps it was against his oath to ally with an Indian girl against the authority of his own uniform, but unless something was done Blue Moon and Badger Davidson would be quickly convicted of this charge at headquarters and assessed long prison sentences. Headquarters would leap at the chance to make an example of trappers who used poison and traders who dealt in illegal pelts.

They walked together a few hundred yards, then Pale Flower sat on a granite boulder and motioned Slater closer to her. She was a woman again, observed Martin, as sure of herself as if all white, And why not, he thought? Pale Flower's heritage was one of prestige and dignity.

"Slater, I just had an idea," she said, her dark eyes glowing. "Ever since his wife left him, the Inspector has . . . well, he has been very interested in me."

The Corporal nodded. He knew that, of course. So were other white men at the post interested.

"Mr. Blackmon has offered to take me into his office," she went on. "If I accepted, do you think I could find proof that he takes orders from Pullman?"

"That's putting it pretty strong," Martin murmured cautiously.

"Everybody knows it up here," shrugged the Indian girl. "What other defense can we offer for Blue Moon and Mr. Davidson?"

He shook his head. No member of the Royal Mounted could enter into a conspiracy against his superior.

"I'll have no part of it," he said harshly. "I advise against it."

Pale Flower's eyes gleamed. "You're a lot like my brother, Slater Martin," she observed.

She leaped to her feet. "I have had to tell my brother to mind his own business and not to interfere in mine," she declared. "Now, Slater Martin, I'll tell you the same thing."

And with that she started briskly back toward the post. The Corporal had to break into a dog trot to overtake her.

MARTIN'S chat with Pale Flower was observed across the river. Cole Pullman pointed out the scene to Beth Davidson while an Indian servant brought them tea in the comfortable lounge room of the main lodge.

"Women are supposed to dote on gossip," he remarked with a thin smile "Well, the latest talk on the post is about Corporal Martin and the pretty Indian."

Beth quickly bent over her teacup so that Pullman would not detect the rush of color to her face. Cole Pullman's eyes gleamed as he noticed her agitation. He did not further elaborate upon details concerning Corporal Martin and Pale Flower. He had said enough to set Beth Davidson to thinking; he was shrewd enough not to overdo it.

Pullman was a shrewd man in all of his dealings. In a brief time he had expanded the Sanokota Fur Company's trade sphere well past the headquarters of Tuquan River, either enveloping or crushing all independent traders within this north-land's realm of eight thousand square miles. Only stubborn Badger Davidson and the troublesome Crees dominated by Blue Moon held out against him. Now those two were securely confined in the post guardhouse facing serious charges.

Blue Moon's conviction was certain and Cole Pullman intended it so. The fate of Davidson was not as cut and dried. Pullman could have crushed Davidson a year ago except for one complication, the traders daughter.

Pullman wanted her. He was no romanticist caught in the web of an entangling love, but as cold and as ruthless in his campaign for Beth's hand as he was in all other matters. He wanted a wife; he needed one. An alliance with a city-bred girl did not impress him as practical. Though city raised, Cole Pullman had quickly adapted himself to the north country. He would never leave it, though his inheritance had enabled him to become a large stockholder in the company he served. There was no bigger man in the Sanokota than Pullman, not even the president.

But he would never abandon this country for the ease of the main office. He loved the challenge of these open wastes: he gloried in the knowledge that up here he was lord. He wanted a wife who would love it also, but who could grace his frontier castle with a beauty and dignity that would impress visitors from the outside. Beth Davidson was the only woman he had ever met who personified all these virtues.

Beth drained her cup and put it aside. Pullman's eyes were upon her; she colored a little beneath his gaze. She had sensed his interest in her but she had never been able to analyze it. If he intended marriage and romance, Pullman was certainly crisp and business-like about it. She could not help admiring him for his ambition and his efficiency; it was natural with her kind of woman to respond to such qualities in a man.

"I want your help, Mr Pullman," she said abruptly. She had tried to picture herself asking Cole Pullman for assistance, and had been unable to do so. Her common sense told her that Pullman would hail her father's imprisonment as the termination of a stubborn if small opposition. But her woman's instinct told her something else, that Pullman would unbend for her.

The superintendent nodded. "For your father," he guessed. He stared at the teacup between his fingers. "What can I do?" he asked gently.

He did not show the elation he felt that finally this proud slim girl had been forced to come to him. It would have to be that way; he would scheme to make it so rather than make the first overture himself.

"I had hoped," faltered Beth, "that your influence . . ."

Her voice fell off. She had pursued Slater Martin into the open country and requested his aid without any plan of action. She had come to Pullman in the same indecision. She had no idea that either of them could do anything. Pullman, she was sure, could do more than Slater.

"I may have some," shrugged Cole. "I'm not sure. But how can I ask that the Mounted ignore such evidence?"

7—Northwest—Winter

"My father bought no poisoned furs!" snapped Beth.

"I didn't say he did," Pullman protested gently. "But the bale of furs, and his own testimony, make a strong case, my dear."

"Yes," she admitted hopelessly.

She stared at the fur rug before her feet for a moment, then raised her eyes. He was studying her intently.

"Then there is nothing you can do?" she asked.

"My dear, I can't stay the forces of law," he smiled. Then he leaned over and patted her shoulder. "But I will do what I can. I have sent a boat up to your father's post and all of his furs will be brought to my warehouse. We will dispose of them through our regular channels and credit you with the full proceeds. You are welcome to use this lodge as long as you like; make it your home and . . ."

"But I couldn't . . ." she started to protest.

Pullman stopped her with a wave of his hand. "Permit me to do what I can," he insisted. "You will want to be close to your father until he is sent down to headquarters."

"But considering the way father hated your company . . ."

He stopped her again. "It was never my way to let personalities enter into business," he informed her. "Your father and my company were bitter business rivals. Every rival of Sanokota is a bitter rival. But I hold no personal grudge and I trust he doesn't."

He bent over her with a smile. "I pray," he murmured, "that *you* don't."

"No," she assured him, "I don't."

He nodded in appreciation of her sentiment and presented his excuses. He walked back to his office with a smile lingering on his lips.

III

HE FOUND Corporal Martin waiting for him. He did not offer his hand. Between the two men was a personal animosity which predated Pullman's interest in Beth. Pullman had found Martin indifferent to his influence and power, and that within itself was enough to irritate the Sanokota superintendent. An inner instinct also warned Pullman

that he would find this Corporal dangerous as well as irritating. He wanted to laugh off that instinct. It was fantastic that a man raised among the Cree Indians, with no education except at a mission school, could be a menace to Cole Pullman's security.

"I have just returned from an inspection trip through the Tuqua country," Corporal Martin said stiffly. "I would like to check your trapper lists."

It was a routine affair; Cole Pullman nodded. A call brought the records of all trappers to whom the Sanokota had extended credit for provisions and supplies.

Slater Martin thumbed through the accounts as if merely completing a dull task. But he had a motive for this search. Purposely he did not ask about the two men he was most interested in, but about others.

Pullman was quick with his replies. Yes, that trapper had just gone into the Tuqua. Another had worked south of the lake the previous winter.

Smoothly Martin brushed over the accounts of Jinx Duval and Sweater Stone.

"Duval . . . he's been with you two winters, hasn't he?"

"Yes," Pullman admitted.

"Stone . . . he has a bad reputation with the Indians, Mr. Pullman. I hope he doesn't start trouble."

"I have warned him," Pullman nodded. "He won't make trouble."

Martin completed his study of the accounts and thanked Pullman.

"Notice any irregularities on your trip, Corporal?"

"None," Mr. Pullman," Slater answered.

"No use of strychnine, for instance?"

Not a muscle stirred in Martin's face. "I have never observed any use of strychnine by your trappers, Mr. Pullman," he assured the superintendent.

Not until he was out of the Sanokota's office did Martin indulge himself in a smile. Pullman had flung a challenge in his face; that was Pullman's way. The Sanokota superintendent had even been taunting. But Martin had learned one thing.

Sweater Stone and Jinx Duval had purchased an ample supply of tobacco at the Sanokota trading post five days before the

illegal pelts had been found in Badger Davidson's warehouse. Why then, had the two Pullman trappers felt it necessary to make a 30-mile overland trip to Davidson's post to buy additional tobacco?

Walking by the guardhouse, Corporal Martin caught a glimpse of Blue Moon standing at the barred window. The Cree raised his hand in casual salute. Martin returned the greeting. He made no effort to interview the prisoners. Inspector Blackmon had forbidden it and the Corporal did not intend to publicly flout the authority of the Inspector.

He stopped before the guardhouse for a chat with Black Mike Cameron who was standing the watch. The constable was a veteran of the Sanokota post. A giant of a man, adept at following a trail or at pacifying an Indian squabble, Constable Cameron was the type of Redcoat James Alexander had requested for duty at Sanokota. Blackmon preferred a different type of enlisted man, a product of the Mounted training school such as Jamie Cameron, Black Mike's younger brother. Already Jamie had the same rank as Black Mike and had been recommended for promotion to Corporal.

Black Mike and Martin had shared many a lonely camp and were close friends. Slater chatted a moment of casual matters, and then asked a favor of the big constable.

"Did you see the furs?—the poisoned pelts Blackmon found in Badger's warehouse."

Cameron nodded. "I packed 'em to the boat."

"Did you notice how they were skinned?"

Black Mike shook his head. The constable stared at Martin.

"You dinnae figger they were trapped by the Crees?" he demanded.

"Just guessing," shrugged Slater. "Are they in the guardhouse?"

The constable nodded. As evidence, the bale of pelts would be kept under lock and key.

"I don't want the Inspector to think I'm nosing around," explained Martin. "I asked to be assigned to the case and he said nix. How about looking 'em over, Mike? I want to know if they were skinned from the rear."



Black Mike started. "I never thought of that," he murmured.

He looked toward the office. The guardhouse door was in plain sight from Blackmon's window.

"Come back by this way in a half-hour," promised the constable, "and I can tell you."

Martin nodded and went on to the office. He made out his report on his inspection trip. He had nothing to file beyond the routine account of his itinerary.

The Corporal hesitated, then added one paragraph for the record. Blackmon was not interested but at least Slater would have on file at the post the fact that he had noted such an undercurrent and had commented upon it.

"The Tuqua country is being overtrapped," he wrote. "For years the Crees have taken no more pelts out of the region than was necessary for them to make a living. Now the Sanokota has sent white trappers into that country. There aren't enough pelts to go around. In the southern country, around Lake Banhoe, there is more game than trappers. This crowded condition in the Tuqua country will lead to trouble. Either the white trappers or the Crees will start robbing lines. It is a bad situation and should be brought to the attention of headquarters immediately."

He did not expect that the report would get beyond Inspector Blackmon's desk. But, at least, he had performed his duty.

Then he returned to Black Mike and the guardhouse door. They smoked their pipes while squatting against the wall as if engaged in nothing more than casual talk.

"I looked at the furs," Black Mike said tersely. "You are right, mon. They were scraped clean. They were skinned from the front."

Slater Martin nodded. He had been sure that examination would reveal that the Crees had not skinned the poisoned pelts. There was always this difference between a pelt brought in by a Cree and by a white trapper at this time of year: The Cree skinned his game from the rear and was very careless in his work, leaving it to his women to carefully scrape off the flesh and fat. The squaws, in turn, usually put that off until spring. The white trapper worked more thoroughly, skinning from the front to get a higher price and scraping the pelts at night.

Corporal Martin mulled over this latest development. It seemed to him that he already had enough confusing evidence to demand a thorough investigation. But he decided to keep what he had learned to himself for the present.

BLACKMON had been drinking. Since his wife had deserted him the Inspector had resorted to whiskey to stifle the loneliness of the long evenings. Blouse askew, eyes bloodshot, he presented a pathetic sight. But Cole Pullman was not capable of pity. The Sanokota superintendent smiled to himself as he entered Blackmon's quarters in answer to the Inspector's careless, "come on in."

Pullman strode to the windows and jerked down the shades.

"You should be more careful," he snapped. "Do you want everybody on the post to see you soaking up liquor like a sponge?"

"What difference does it make?" Blackmon countered wearily. "Here, have a drink."

"No." The superintendent had just talked with Beth Davidson at the lodge. He was a-tingle with the prospects of an earlier conquest than he had imagined.

Gradually she was realizing, without him ever putting his proposal into words, the price she must pay for the release of her father, and she seemed to be reconciling herself to it.

Blackmon stared sourly at the superintendent. "I can't hold Blue Moon and Davidson without trial forever," he grumbled. "I've got to send 'em down the river for trial before long."

"You are still investigating the case," shrugged Pullman. "You aren't expected to send in prisoners until you have gathered all the testimony available."

"If I get caught in this," the Inspector warned Pullman, "I'm sunk. You know that."

"You won't get caught," Cole assured him.

"I don't know," demurred the tormented man. "This corporal Martin, he has been snooping around the place all day."

"Look, man," Pullman said crisply "This is your chance. I promised you I'd take care of you. You have to hold Blue Moon and Davidson a few more days anyhow. My plans are nearly complete."

Blackmon poured another drink. He had reached that stage of intoxication now when he was convinced that he was wiser than his fellow man.

"You aren't pulling the wool over my eyes," he croaked. "You're trying to get that Davidson wench to marry you."

"What if I am?" demanded Pullman.

The superintendent's tone was menacing. Blackmon was sober enough to realize he had better not pursue this subject any further.

"Aw, it's none of my business," he mumbled. "I don't blame you. A man needs a woman. Any kind of woman. I wish to hell Mona would listen to reason . . ."

"Mona is not going to live at a jumping-off place like this," Pullman interrupted. "You know it so quit whining. String along with me and I'll have you out of here with enough money to get Mona back."

"I hope to God I can," sighed Blackmon.

"In the meantime," advised Cole, standing up, "why not solace yourself with some of these Indian women? That girl Corporal Martin is always walking with, Blue

Moon's sister . . . surely she would prefer the attentions of an inspector to the casual company of a Corporal."

"She aint easy," answered the Inspector, sighing again.

A slight sneer curved Pullman's lips. He wanted a wife, and meant to have Beth Davidson, but he was not weak enough to let a physical desire completely upset him and lead to his ruin.

"I think you can send Blue Moon in before long," the superintendent said curtly. He never enjoyed Blackmon's company. Before Mona had left Sanokota, the Inspector had been Pullman's dinner guest often and the two men had even played amateurish games of chess. But now Cole spent only the time with Blackmon than was necessary to keep the Inspector under his thumb.

Blackmon raised his tired eyes. "How can I send in Blue Moon without Davidson? Answer me that."

"I'll answer that when the time comes," Pullman promised. "Trust me for that."

And the superintendent left the Mounted officer to the poor comfort of his bottle.

CORPORAL Slater Martin had carefully watched Cole Pullman dart across the river in one of the Sanokota power boats, then had rowed himself across the stream and had paid a call on Beth.

He was upset by the stiffness of her attitude. She greeted him formally. She did not seem interested in what he had to say about her father's plight.

"I don't know what can be done," he said after completing his account of Black Mike's examination of the furs and his own sleuthing into the Sanokota's records. "There is something wrong, but I don't see how it can be uncovered."

Beth Davidson was silent a moment. Then she said in a low strained voice:

"I think I know what can be done."

"What?"

"I'd do anything for my father's freedom," she murmured instead of giving him a direct answer. "I think I know who can free him."

Martin stared at her. There was no need to ask what she was thinking about it. He sighed. At times he wished he could find the words to express what he felt.

"Blackmon won't last up here forever," he muttered. "The Royal Mounted doesn't let men like him stay in command long. There aren't many rotten apples in the barrel, and sooner or later headquarters finds 'em out and gets rid of 'em. When Blackmon goes, Pullman won't run this country to suit himself."

He wanted to say more, to promise more.

But ingrained in him was a reluctance to discuss his superior's faults, even when that superior was threatening his personal happiness.

"How long will it take?" Beth demanded. "A year maybe, or two? Dad would die in that length of time. He can't stand being cooped up."

Martin turned his hat over and over in his hands.

"I suppose," he said after a moment, resentment in his voice, "that marrying a rich man means a lot. Cole Pullman has a fine home and everything a woman wants."

"Yes," agreed Beth with a catch in her throat. "Everything."

Martin stood up, conscious that he had said the wrong thing but unable to veer off on another tack.

"I'll do what I can just the same," he said gruffly. "If not for you and Badger, for Blue Moon. And for the rest of the people in this Sanokota country."

He turned and walked away. He passed within a stone's throw of Pullman's power boat as the superintendent came back across the river. Shafts of moonlight were playing over the water and Pullman recognized him. His lips parted in a mirthless smile. So the strait-laced corporal was still paying court to Beth Davidson! That inner instinct warned Pullman again; Slater Martin was a menace to his security. This time he did not shrug off the warning. Perhaps it was true that Martin was getting to be a nuisance around the Sanokota post!

Corporal Martin walked slowly to his quarters. He glanced toward the guard-house which was a single black shadow against the background of shifting night clouds. Constable Jamie Cameron, Black Mike's brother, was pacing before the barred door. Martin was tempted to ask Jamie for a stealthy interview with Blue

Moon, then decided against it. Jamie could hardly refuse and it would not be fair to jeopardize the young policeman's record. He walked on.

A voice stopped him. Pale Flower appeared out of the darkness.

"Slater?"

His name was one of the few words she did not pronounce without a trace of an accent. She called him "Sla-ter," making two long syllables of his name.

"Yes, Pale Flower."

She stood close to him, as straight as a reed, and as proud.

"I have been watching, Slater," she said, waving her hand in the direction of the Sanokota warehouses. "If she should marry him, her father would go free, wouldn't he?"

"I don't know," Slater said tonelessly.

"That is why he is interested in her," the Indian girl said fiercely. "That is why she is accepting his attentions. Then my brother would be sent down the river. All of the blame would fall upon him. And others of my brother's people would be punished, too."

"I'm afraid so, Pale Flower."

"It is that Inspector Blackmon's fault," declared the girl. "Under James Alexander it was not so. Inspector Alexander watched after the rights of the Indians. He kept the fur companies from imposing upon them. If Inspector Blackmon was to be removed and . . ."

She stopped short. She stared at Martin a moment. Then she said with a catch in her throat:

"I can do that."

"You can what?"

"I can ruin Inspector Blackmon. I can get him dismissed from the Mounted."

"How?" Martin demanded.

"There are ways," answered Pale Flower evasively, a smile playing about her full red lips.

Martin looked at her incredulously. "You know Blackmon's only interest in you," he snapped. "You wouldn't be fool enough . . ."

"Trust Pale Flower," the Indian girl advised him. "Perhaps, Sla-ter, when Blackmon is dismissed, they will make you Inspector. Perhaps you can persuade her across the river to withhold her answer. Tell her, too, to trust Pale Flower."

She turned and darted away before Slater Martin could be sure of the sob in her voice.

He walked on. Pale Flower was no unschooled Indian girl who would be dazzled by a white man's attentions. Pale Flower was as much white, except for her color and her heritage, as Beth Davidson, and probably much wiser to the ways of men and civilization.

He would do just that, he decided. He would wait and trust Pale Flower.

IV

SHE was the personification of pagan charm as she stood before Inspector Blackmon's desk. With a coyness that would have done credit to a sophisticated debutante displaying her poise in an elaborate drawing room, she informed the Inspector that she had decided to accept the position in his office.

Blackmon's eyes gleamed as they devoured her slim straight body. Such a companion would hasten the days and weeks until Cole Pullman had made good the promise to give him a position with the Sanokota Fur Company which would enable Blackmon to shed the scarlet coat, live in a city and perhaps win Mona back.

"There is not much work to be done," the Inspector assured her. "The files must be kept in order and duplicate copies made of all reports. That's about all."

"I'm sure I can do it," Pale Flower nodded.

Blackmon leaned back in his chair and happily watched her move gracefully about the office making order out of chaos.

"If we get along well," he promised her in sudden inspiration, "I might be able to do something for your brother."

She bobbed her dark head. Blackmon chuckled to himself. Pullman was using that angle to lure a woman, why shouldn't he? He could keep his promise, of course. But since when were promises to an Indian girl held against a white man?"

He considered all afternoon how he could arrange a tryst with this young woman. He remembered the guest lodges across the river. The Sanokota Fur Company could entertain as many as six families. Each guest lodge was complete, even to cooking utensils.

He made his proposal to Pale Flower before the end of the day. She calmly shook her head. He wheedled. She remained adamant. But that she was not offended by his invitation, that she refused him with a smile, encouraged him to try again.

The following morning she refused again.

"What's the matter with me, Pale Flower?" he demanded. "Don't you like me?"

"You are married already," she answered. "Even if your wife is not living with you, you are married."

He was disgruntled at that reply and left her alone for the time being. What did she think she was, speaking about his wife? If he weren't already married, it would make no difference in how he regarded her?

She was willing to let this mood wear itself away. She had no intention of yielding easily. Lust was in his heart and in his eyes. Louis Blackmon was in her power. An inspector of the Royal Mounted who carried on a *liaison* with an Indian employe would be dealt with summarily at headquarters. Toward that end she was leading on Blackmon provocatively, but carefully. She must have formal proof of any illicit association. She had decided how to get it.

But the following morning she repulsed his half-hearted advances with cool delight. Thinking back, she wondered why she had not anticipated her brother's escape from the guardhouse. Corp. Slater Martin, after the first shock of learning that Blue Moon had gotten away, wondered the same thing. Blackmon and Cole Pullman had reason to be amazed; no prisoner had broken out of the guardhouse before. But Pale Flower and Corporal Martin should have been able to receive the announcement of the Cree chieftain's escape with a smiling "I told you so."

Would any man-made barriers hold Blue Moon!

The report of Blue Moon's escape brought Pullman across the river in a state of alarm.

"Why didn't you put double guards around the guardhouse?" the Sanokota superintendent demanded of the chagrined Blackmon. "This can queer everything."

RAZOR SHARP

In the Far North, the moisture of one's breath congeals in winter upon even a three-day beard, and the traveler soon finds that he is wearing an ice-mask. His face begins to freeze, but he can't thaw it out with his warm hand. The only known preventive is a daily shave.

THE INACCESSIBLE POLE

Many people are inclined to think that the most difficult spot to reach in the Arctic, by ship and dog-team, is the North Pole. But it isn't. The point most difficult to reach is an area in the Arctic Ocean about 400 miles northwest of Prince Patrick Island, 800 miles north of Point Barrow and 400 miles south of the Pole, Or, to be exact, 83° 50' N. Lat. 160° W. Long. This spot is known by Arctic explorers as the Inaccessible Pole.

ON THE MOVE

The geographical North Pole is often confused with the Magnetic North Pole. The former is at the apex of the earth, amid the drifting ice fields; the Magnetic North Pole, according to a party of Canadian scientists who visited the site by airplane in 1947, seems to have shifted some 200 miles in the last 45 years, and is now located on Somerset Island, between Peel Sound and Prince Regent Inlet, about 700 miles west of Greenland.

Pullman was seldom excited but now he paced up and down the Inspector's office. "The Crees will take to the warpaths if he gives the word. An Indian outbreak would ruin us. There would be an investigation and we can't stand that. Not now."

Blackmon nodded. He was far calmer than his confederate today. In this crisis the Inspector was displaying some of the ability and character which had impressed his superiors at training school, the character that had been his until his young wife had become unhappy with his assignment and he had fallen under Pullman's influence. "I have assigned three men to the pursuit," he said. "The Cameron brothers left before daylight to cut off Blue Moon at the Tuqua headquarters. Corporal Martin is now making his preparations to go among the Crees with presents. If there is any man who can coun-

teract Blue Moon's influence with them, it is Martin."

"We must get Blue Moon," Pullman said grimly. "And we must see that he doesn't get away again."

Blackmon nodded again. Then he asked with a quirk to his lips: "Have you warned Sweater Stone and Jinx Duval?"

Pullman started. "You don't think . . .!"

"I'd take no chances," shrugged the Inspector. "Blue Moon is a smart Indian. He may have put two and two together."

"I'll send out for them," decided the Sanokota superintendent. "As a matter of fact," he said after a moment's thought, "I'll move 'em south. No use of them staying in the Tuqua country through the winter."

"No use at all," agreed Blackmon.

Pale Flower came into the office to notify the Inspector that Corporal Martin had reported. There was no hint of triumph on the Indian girl's face.

Pullman left immediately. "Let me know if we can be of any assistance to you, Inspector," he called back from the door as he passed Martin without a greeting. That, of course, was for the benefit of the Corporal and the Indian girl and anyone else who might be listening.

CORPORAL Martin saluted the Inspector. "All ready, sir," he said crisply.

Blackmon nodded and unrolled a map of the northern Sanokota region. The Cree camps lay upriver from the post. The Tuquan River spread out on the parchment like a sprawling snake until it split into three forks.

"I have sent the Prewitts to this junction, Corporal," said Blackmon, pointing to the river forks. "Going overland, they should be able to cut off Blue Moon despite the soft snow. They have the two best teams of huskies we have on the post. I want you to take the river, Martin. Look for Blue Moon among the Cree camps. He won't be there, but report back if the Indians display any sign of an uprising. If so, I'll have to send to Catawba for more men."

Martin nodded. The Crees would take the warpaths if Blue Moon commanded.

"You're supposed to be a wizard with a canoe, Corporal," went on the Inspector.

Now this unusual mood of efficiency had left him and there was a trace of a sneer in his voice. "Blue Moon hasn't over a two-hour start. Perhaps you can overtake him before he gets to the Cree lodges."

"No, sir," Martin answered truthfully, remembering the Indian's strength and skill. "He'll gain on me. I'll be a half-day behind him by nightfall."

Blackmon brooded unhappily over this a moment. Much mischief could be wrought in a half-day.

"Do what you can," the Inspector growled. "Lay into that paddle like you never laid into it before. I'm counting on you, Corporal, to dog Blue Moon so closely that he can't pick up a team of huskies. Without dogs he'll never get past the Tuquan forks. A quick freeze would help us. But that damned sky is as clear as glass."

"I don't expect a freeze for a few more days," Martin murmured.

"From the Cree camps," continued Blackmon, "go on to the Tuqua forks and pick up the Prewitts. You should have Blue Moon between you and the post then."

The Inspector hesitated, remembering the close friendship between the Indian and the lean Corporal.

"You mustn't let your personal feelings interfere with your duty, Corporal," he snapped.

Martin met his eyes squarely. "I never have, sir," he answered firmly. Then, after a slight hesitation: "I have a double incentive for bringing Blue Moon in alive," he added. "He is innocent of this charge against him. I intend to prove it."

Blackmon stared at him. "We'll go into that later," Blackmon said coldly. "The important thing now is to retake Blue Moon."

"On that," the Corporal agreed, "we both agree."

"Don't come back without him," growled the Inspector.

A faint smile touched the Corporal's face. "Inspector, Blue Moon knows the north country better than I ever will. If he gets past the Tuqua forks and the freeze hits, it will be like searching for a needle in a haystack. There is a valley far up past the Tuquan that the Crees have known about for years. The springs run

hot water and even in dead winter."

"Is there such a valley?" demanded Blackmon. "I thought it was a myth."

"It is no myth," Martin shrugged. "Blue Moon's people wintered there when the caribou were scarce before the white man came. Blue Moon can find it. I'll hunt for him, Inspector. But I don't promise that I'll find him, or that I'll bring him back."

With that he saluted and stalked out of the Inspector's office. Many eyes watched him push off from the shore and start upstream. Beth Davidson watched from the Sanokota's lodge, watched until the scarlet coat disappeared from sight. From the guardhouse Badger Davidson watched, too, with a smile on his grizzled lips. Badger could have followed Blue Moon to freedom. The trader had refused. The trail Blue Moon must blaze to keep away from the Mounted was no trail for an old man to follow, not with the full fury of winter not far away.

Cole Pullman watched from his office. Martin, thought the Sanokota superintendent, was the Northland's prize chump. The Corporal would follow Blue Moon's trail faithfully and no doubt bring back his man. Pullman underestimated the Indians to that extent; he did not concede Blue Moon either the endurance or the astuteness to make a clean getaway. The Corporal, mused Pullman, will bring his man and I'll have the Corporal's girl eating out of my hand by then and Martin's reward for a long pursuit will be to watch Beth Davidson become Mrs. Cole Pullman.

Pale Flower also followed the swirling path of the canoe.

"I wish I were going with you, Slater," she murmured to herself. "I wish we were going together to find Blue Moon, and none of us were coming back."

Meanwhile Slater Martin was blaming himself for the Indian's escape. He should have talked to Blue Moon despite the Inspector's wishes. He should have assured the Cree that at least one man of the Royal Mounted was determined to see justice done. Perhaps Blue Moon would have trusted him, though it was true that Martin's influence over the Cree chieftain was waning. Blue Moon did not hold Slater responsible for the increasing

favoritism of the Mounted in the Sankota country, but it was doubtful if the Indian would put his trust in the Scarlet Coats again.

Then Martin ceased his musing. What had been done was done. For the moment all that mattered was the recapture of Blue Moon.

He dipped in closer to the shores and studied the banks for evidence of Blue Moon's progress. His intuition told him that the Cree would bolt for the Tuquan forks and the mysterious hidden valley far to the north. But he would carefully consider all possibilities. He was not trailing a chechako. He was pursuing a fugitive who knew this northland country as well as any living man, and who had hungrily drunk up all of the white man's lore in addition to jealously retaining his native cunning.

V

SLATER MARTIN was received with cool dignity by the Crees. He had known their venerable chiefs since boyhood; he had presents for Rapid Stream and Tall Hunter and Big Bear. He asked about their hunts and their pelts and if the berries had been tasty and plentiful. It was quickly obvious to him that Blue Moon had come and gone. The red men were not skilled at artifice; they were merely waiting for the Corporal to inquire about the fugitive.

Finally he got around to that. Shaking his head, he said sadly: "My brother, Blue Moon, passed this way yesterday."

"It is bad that he chose to flee," went on Martin. "There are those of us among the Royal Mounted who have known Blue Moon a long time. We do not believe that either he or his Cree brothers need poison to trap their pelts. It is only the poor hunters and the poor trappers who must use poison. The Crees, who have hunted here forever, who have been great warriors, do not use poison."

It seemed to him that their eyes brightened but he could not be sure. But he could tell they were pleased with his statements.

"The Royal Mounted and the Crees are friends," continued the Corporal. "Nothing must break up that friendship. The

men in the redcoats now must overtake Blue Moon and return him to the post. He must stand trial in order that his innocence can be established. Then, when he is free, the Crees will know that the Royal Mounted means to be a brother to the red men."

He waited for the Crees to speak. For a moment they were coldly silent. Then Rapid Stream spoke.

"Blue Moon, your brother, has come and gone," the wrinkled chief said coldly. "There were those among us, particularly our young men, who did not wish him to flee. Stay, they told him, and not all of the might of the Royal Mounted can take you from us. But Blue Moon wished to go. There are white men who have no love for Blue Moon, and all of the white men stand together against the Indian, whether the red man is right or wrong. Blue Moon has promised to return, but only to lead those of us who will follow to a country where the Crees can trap and hunt in peace."

The Rapid Stream added, almost smiling: "Two of the white men in the red coats have already passed near to our lodges. They are driving their dogs too hard for such snow. The white men may as well go back to their post—even you, my brother. Blue Moon will leave no trail. The wind sweeping across the snows leaves no tracks to follow."

Martin nodded. Trailing Blue Moon would indeed be like chasing a will-if-the-wisp. But he was gratified that Blue Moon had not incited the Crees to violent resistance. It was written on these coppery faces that they intended to be docile until Blue Moon was heard from again.

The Corporal arose to leave. "I am glad that my friends trust us," he declared. "We will return Blue Moon to our post and there will find him innocent of the charge against him. Then we will return him to his people and the Royal Mounted and the Crees will again be brothers."

He walked to his canoe without looking back. He knew that beneath their stolid exteriors they were laughing at him for his temerity in stating so blandly that Blue Moon could be re-taken. And he knew also that despite their regard for him personally, they were holding aloof

from any expression of friendship or admiration for the uniform he wore.

The sting of winter was in the air as he made camp that night. A warning at this time of year was never a false one. He leveled blackbush around his fire and even then shivered inside the windbreak. Snowflakes pattered over him and around him, freezing as they struck. The freeze had come. In the morning the crust would be hard. A man on snowshoes or with a dog team could make good time. There would be only a few more hours of travel by canoe until the river froze. If Blue Moon had not reached the forks of the Tuquan, if the Prewitt brothers had been able to outrace him for the shallow lagoon where the three tributaries merged into one, then the Mounted pursuers had their quarry between them.

ICE CAKES bobbing down the river caused Martin to abandon the canoe early next morning. He cached it carefully, then trudged in the face of the driving snow toward the Tuquan forks. It was near dark when he reached the crude camp in which Mike and Jamie Prewitt had made themselves comfortable against the northland fury. Yapping dogs warned them of his approach.

Black Mike answered his question about Blue Moon by pointing to signs still visible on the sandy beach, from which the north wind was sweeping the snow as fast as it fell. A canoe had been pulled up here, a fire built.

Martin nodded. Blackmon, in reasoning that two men with dog teams could outrace Blue Moon to the Tuquan forks, had not considered the Indian's endurance with a paddle.

The Corporal deliberated as he poured boiling tea into his chilled body. Blue Moon had had a day's canoeing up one of these tributaries before the freeze had hit. A boat left no sign; it was a guess which fork the Cree had taken. Martin explained his strategy to the two constables. There was no point in an aimless pursuit. On they must go, cold or no cold, but they would be wise to wait until they could discover some sign of the route Blue Moon had taken.

Black Mike nodded. He was a giant of a man, standing six feet four inches in

his stocking feet. Martin had a wholesome respect for his abilities to follow a cold trail or to provide for himself in the northland. Jamie was younger and smaller, a graduate of the Mounted's training school with only brief experience in the Sanokota. Black Mike had stopped at Dan Grissom's trading post and had loaded his sled heavily with supplies; Jamie had raced for the Tuquan forks as Blackmon had ordered, believing that he outrun their quarry.

"We'll fix a good camp here," decided Martin.

"But Blue Moon has a start already," objected Jamie. "Giving him more time means . . ."

"Martin here has brought more than one man out of that country," Black Mike reproved his young brother, nodding toward the north. "You don't bring 'em back by getting in a hurry. It ain't ever easy to find 'em."

For a day the three Mounted Policemen worked with their axes, hewing limbs and undergrowth. The Corporal chopped ice in the river until there was open water, ducked evergreen branches beneath its surface, then flung the soaked growth upon the rising walls of their lodge. Wet brush clung together, then froze solid. By nightfall they had a cold-proof igloo-type shelter.

Just before sundown Martin and Mike Prewitt lay in wait at a nearby salt lick and trudged back to camp an hour later heavily burdened with fresh game. Most of it was hung up to freeze.

"You act," grumbled Jamie, "as if we were going to stay here all winter."

"Could be," Martin shrugged.

"You can be sure, lad," Black Mike said with indulgent gruffness, "that Blue Moon isn't out in this kind of weather. He's holed up somewhere, too."

In the morning they started their search for evidence of Blue Moon's route. The wind was high as Mike and Slater guided the dog team back and forth across the icy surface of the Tuquan tributary Martin had selected. But the Corporal was grateful for the gale; the ice was clear and shining, the bottom of the river plainly visible.

Back in camp Jamie, following orders, chopped holes in the ice and fished. Not

only must they feed themselves but there were two teams of huskies to be provided for. The young constable pulled in one squirming perch after another. They froze almost as soon as they were yanked out of the icy water.

Martin and Black Mike went up the tributary for twenty miles without discovering any trail traces. They returned to camp weary and cold, but not discouraged. Neither had expected the pursuit of Blue Moon to be an easy assignment.

They rested in camp for a day, though the younger Prewitt found it hard to control his impatience. According to the manuals at the training school, Redcoats took a fugitive's trail and never relented until their quarry was overtaken. But here Corporal Martin and his brother, veterans both, were apparently in no hurry.

The wind had died off and Martin saw no reason to patrol the ice, which was covered by soft snow. The gale came back the following day and Martin, with Mike Prewitt, mushed their huskies up a second tributary, zig-zagging from bank to bank, studying every inch of the ice beneath them.

Another disappointment, and another delay as the breeze died off.

Then, two days later and fifteen miles up the third fork of the Tuquan, Black Mike noticed the chip imbedded in the ice. Carefully the redcoats chopped it free. It had been recently-cut. A few other wood chips were similarly imbedded nearby.

Prewitt grunted in satisfaction and regarded his superior with an admiration that was kin to worship. Now they had eliminated two of the winding forks of the Tuquan, for they could guess that the camper ahead of them was Blue Moon. No trapper would be as caught by an overdue freeze as far north. No game except reindeer and inedible fowl existed beyond the Tuquan headwaters.

THEY MADE preparations for the chase. Both dog-sleds were re-enforced and one was loaded heavily with provisions, including frozen fish for both teams of huskies. Corporal Martin assigned Black Mike to this supply sled, which must travel at a slower pace but which could follow the slopes and low

HOT POLE

We all learned in school that, per square mile per hour, there is more heat received from the sun at the Equator than anywhere else. But we are likely to overlook the fact, that, while each hour of sunlight brings most heat to the Equator, the hours of summer sunshine increase in number as we go away from the "line." In mid-summer, as you go north, the length of the day increases more rapidly than the amount of heat per hour decreases. So that, although the heat per hour received at Winnipeg is less than it is, for example, at New Orleans, the amount of heat received per day is greater. In fact according to Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the explorer, for something like five weeks each summer there is received from the sun more heat per square mile per day at the North Pole than at the Equator.

country. Martin and the younger Constable, with a light sled and their pick of the huskies, would attempt to find Blue Moon. Black Mike's assignment was to follow the winding tributary of the Tuquan.

Martin did not expect that the Cree had reached the legendary warm valley. The freeze had come quickly; a man without dogs could be no more than three or four days travel ahead, unless he had been foolhardy enough to don snowshoes and head straight into the north wind with no more supplies than he could carry on his back. Blue Moon, the Corporal was sure, would not do that.

This was new country to the Corporal; he selected his route cautiously. The Tuquan tributary crawled through the lowlands, with high country breaking away on either side. Reaching a rimtop, Martin surveyed the region below him, studying the course of the stream, then turning the huskies away from the valley and emerging from heights further on.

Now Jamie Prewitt was no longer skeptical of his superior. Jamie had seen patience pay off once, in the form of tell-tale wood chips. He did not question Martin when the Corporal suggested they pitch a long camp until the wind changed.

For two days they rested in camp. Martin replenished their larder by dropping a caribou buck. The meat was stringy and tough; this animal had grazed southward earlier than the big herds and its

flesh had the taint of an arctic beast living out of its element.

The wind veered back until it was straight out of the North and cold in their faces. This was what Corporal Martin had been waiting for. The two redcoats resumed their cautious pursuit. Always there was a tier of granite and ice between them and the valley. No human eye, no matter how alert, could detect them from below.

Martin patiently explained to Jamie why he was employing this strategy. The young constable regarded him a little skeptically, unwilling to believe that any white man had the highly-developed sense the Corporal was trusting so confidently.

But, two days later, Slater's patience was rewarded. Emerging out of the heights onto a tableland from which miles and miles of valley country was in view, Martin sniffed the wind and nodded.

"Smell it?" he asked Jamie.

The young constable wasn't positive, but he did believe that he scented wood smoke.

Martin waited there for twilight to drop. Then for an hour or more they mushed down the slopes. They could see their trail ahead but Martin knew that they could not be detected from any great distance. The limits of human vision waned quickly in a northland afternoon.

With dark they rolled in their blankets without the comfort of a fire. The night air was lighter; a fresh snow was on its way.

Even Jamie Prewitt now was positive their quarry was near — supposing, of course, that they had not veered off onto the trail of a mysterious northland traveler. The smell of smoke was strong in their nostrils. Before another sun set they could expect to be within striking distance of Blue Moon.

VI

THE FLAKES were heavy and soft; Martin and Jamie stalked blindly on. The Corporal's sense of direction guided them; there was no tell-tale scent in this heavy air. But the Corporal was grateful for this heavy fall. Blue Moon's powers of sight and smell would be as useless as their own.

The dogs had been left tethered to aspens with a supply of fish to gorge themselves into drowsiness. The sound of the Redcoats' snowshoes was lost in the pattern of swirling flakes. Vision was so poor that Martin slipped on the icy crest of the Tuquan tributary before he realized that they had reached the stream. He pushed his parka back and squinted into the snow. Then for two miles or more he led his young companion upstream. They had to approach Blue Moon's hideout with the snow at their backs. Pushing into the drift, a man could see no further in front of him than his own hand.

Vision was clearer as Martin turned back. He did not expect Blue Moon's camp to be over a hundred yards from the stream, though it would be nestled under some protecting ledge.

He caught a scent of the smoke before he found the hideout. Martin stole forward, Jamie Prewitt at his heels, following his sense of smell. They were no more than fifty paces from the fugitive's lodge when it loomed up in their scope of vision, shapeless at first, then clearer.

A log and skin lodge almost hidden by a granite ledge sheltered Blue Moon, or some other nomad of the north country, from the snow. Martin darted forward, reasonably sure that no man was peering out from the skin-covered openings in the log walls. He reached the cover of the hut without being challenged. Jamie Prewitt sprinted forward and found the same shelter.

Prewitt motioned to the door but Martin shook his head. The first sound of anyone at the door would send Blue Moon, or whomever they had trailed, diving for his rifle. Life must be hard in this north country but there was no necessity for it being cheap also. Sooner or later Blue Moon must emerge from the cabin. Chopped wood was piled high against the lee side of the structure.

They waited, Martin with careless patience and confidence, Prewitt tense and a-quiver.

A creaking inside finally warned them that the cabin's occupant intended to come out. Both policemen flattened themselves against the rough wall. Wind whined as the door was flung opened and a dark shape started . . .

Jamie leaped first. Jamie leaped almost too quickly. The assailed man flung up a knee and the younger Redcoat went rolling off. Had there not been two policemen, Blue Moon would have been free of Prewitt's attack, could have bolted into the white unknown to exist if he could.

But Slater Martin caught him from behind, wrestled him to the snow, and then Jamie leaped on to make the conquest complete.

They pulled him inside and slammed the door shut. The cabin was dark except for the light from the crude fireplace, but the identity of their captive was quickly established. He lay glaring up at them with eyes that burned hatred. They had not followed the wrong trail. Their prisoner was the Cree chieftain, Blue Moon.

Slater Martin saw that he was bound securely, then turned away from the hatred in the Cree's eyes, a little sick at heart. Blue Moon was guilty of nothing more than resenting the oppression of a white man. But Martin's duty demanded that he take the fugitive back to face a white man's justice, even if the Corporal could not guarantee that justice would be done.

Blue Moon struggled up to a sitting position. His dark eyes glared at Martin.

"My brother has learned much from his friends, the Crees," growled the Indian. "No other white man could have found me so easily."

Martin nodded.

"My brother was wrong to flee," Martin said quietly. "My brother knows that the arm of the white man reaches out everywhere. My brother did not use poison. He must go back to prove that to the satisfaction of the white men who have charged it."

"There is no justice among the white men," Blue Moon snapped. "The white man's court will take the word of Cole Pullman because Pullman owns it. Once the Redcoats were men of honor and friends of all. But that was before Inspector Blackmon came to the Sanokota. Now the Redcoats are hirelings of Pullman. They do his bidding. Even you, my brother, because you blindly follow the orders of Blackmon."

Martin sighed as he appropriated the

CAN'T MISS

Stefansson has traveled some 22,000 miles by dog-team in northern latitudes—and he has never been lost. He remembers from which direction the last strong wind blew. For such a wind leaves snow-drifts, low and narrow to windward, and higher and wider to leeward. Having determined whether the drift runs from NE to SW, let us say; or from SW to NE, and having some idea of his destination, he simply cuts across the drifts at the angle which will bring him there—or follows along the drifts, either to the NE or SW.

For travel in winter along the Arctic coast, this method is infallible; if you veer too far from the land, you will be deflected by the rough ice. And if you suspect that you have left the shore ice and are traveling over the snow-covered tundra, you can check by kneeling in the snow and, with your hunting knife, digging deep enough to determine whether there is sea ice or earth and moss beneath the snow.

captive's supplies and put tea on to boil.

"Justice comes slow," he admitted. "But the Royal Mounted will see that the Indians are treated fairly. My brother must stand before the big chiefs of the Mounted and speak as he has spoken to me. He must answer accusation with accusation. Some things I have learned. I will stand with my brother and speak of what I have learned and what I believe."

"Once I would have believed in such honor," answered Blue Moon, shaking his head. "But no more."

His lips parted in a snarl. "I will never face a white man's court," he declared. "My brother has found me in the north country, but he has not taken me back. Not yet."

Martin sighed. "I will get you back, Blue Moon," he promised, but not gloatingly. "Don't doubt that."

"If I go," declared the Indian, "my brother must carry me like I were a sack of grain. I will not walk a step. Can you do that, my brother? Can you carry a heavy man all the way back through this winter?"

The Corporal nodded. "I can," he said quietly. "If my brother does not choose to walk, he does not have to. He can lie still upon a sled and be hauled back by dogs, a helpless fallen warrior."

Blue Moon subsided. Martin bound him to the heavy-timbered bunk and later

placed food and drink within his reach. Then the Corporal and Jamie divided a night watch. The younger policemen protested this as unnecessary.

"The man could never get free of those bonds," asserted Jamie.

Martin shook his head. He did not think so either but he was not underestimating the prowess of their prisoner. They had caught Blue Moon unawares once because the Cree had misjudged the powers of his pursuers. Once free again, the Indian might never be caught, at least not so easily.

With daylight they retrieved their sled and huskies and appropriated Blue Moon's cache of provisions. The Cree had hunted and fished diligently; there was more than they could load, especially since their prisoner must be wrapped in furs and bound tightly to the sled. Blue Moon had refused again to walk.

"You may drag me," he answered with his eyes flashing defiantly, "but I will not walk a step."

Martin did not insist. They had an extra sled, for Mike Prewitt would not be over two days' distance downstream. They could treat the Cree chieftain like so much baggage.

THEY came upon Black Mike three days later sluggishly pursuing the winding stream. The winter was lashing at them in all its fury now but Martin felt no apprehension about continuing their journey. The extra sled was laden heavily with supplies; they could follow a leisurely pace down the Tuquan tributary to the main stream, and then to the first trading post, Badger Davidson's now abandoned warehouse. It was no journey for a chechako but for hardened men it did not seem like a terrifying ordeal.

To save the huskies, Martin and Black Mike broke trail ahead of the sleds, with the eager Jamie giving them periods of rest. Down the bed of the tributary, a smooth frozen causeway, they trudged stolidly. Martin would not risk a more direct route. No man could trust his senses in such a cold. Heavy snow, freezing as it struck, had covered any landmarks he might recognize. Haste was no longer important and, well supplied with

food and blankets and furs, they only had to fear getting lost in these trackless wastes. By following the winding path of the stream they took no chances.

Blue Moon carried out his threat. The Indian might have been an immobile statue the way he lay on his sledge, tightly bound with rawhide. The Cree ate his meals with a rifle trained upon him, then was re-bound to his sled and slept in this uncomfortable position. He would ask no quarter and Slater Martin dared not grant any. The Indian did not speak except to demand water or food. Stopping early, throwing up windbreaks against the rushing cold, the three policemen talked for long intervals each night. Not one word did Blue Moon contribute, not even when asked a direct question.

The hatred and determination in his eyes never ebbed. He had, Martin mused unhappily, reverted to the spirit of his fathers. He was all Indian. In his heart was nothing but smouldering animosity for the white man.

No longer did one of the Redcoats stand an incessant guard over the prisoner. Each night before rolling in his blankets and fur wraps, Martin carefully inspected the rawhide bonds. Blue Moon could move one hand slightly; that was all. There was no possibility of him wriggling free.

The Cree had tried it; the condition of his wrists and ankles showed that. He had pressed against the fastenings until he had broken his skin in several places, had rubbed raw spots which must pain him. But he did not complain.

There was nothing in Blue Moon's expression when Martin inspected the rawhide ties to indicate that the Indian had decided to resort to desperate means to escape. Martin rolled in his cover sure that the captive was bound fast.

So he was. Blue Moon did not try to loosen or break the rawhide. But, as the heavy breathing of the three Redcoats indicated they were sound asleep, the Indian strained to one side until he had rolled over with the sled on top. With a mighty effort he made another complete turn. Then he thrust off the furs protecting him against the cold with his partially-free hand.

He was so close to the fire now that the warmth brought perspiration to his face.

Another turn, and the sled was over the coals. The greased wood caught fire. Blue Moon maneuvered more of the sled onto the blaze.

It was the effort of a desperate man. Suffer some pain he must, perhaps too much pain. But, when the sled was afire under him, he pulled his feet free. One moccasin was smouldering; Blue Moon kicked it off. A yank of his arms and the burning sled collapsed and he rolled away from the fire. He kicked a few coals out into the snow, wriggled toward them and pressed his hands down upon their heat. The rawhide smoked. Blue Moon strained with all of his strength.

But just as they snapped Slater Martin came awake with a start. The stench of greased wood and the smell of smouldering hawhide had penetrated the policeman's deep layer of sleep.

He leaped for Blue Moon but the Indian threw out a shoulder and rolled Martin backward. The Cree's bonds parted with a snap as he strained desperately.

He looked around wildly. The Prewitt brothers were out of their blankets; Martin was scrambling to his feet. The Indian's scheme to make off with the other sled and one of the dog teams was thwarted. Now all three white men charged him.

With a low cry Blue Moon seized the other sled and heaved it toward the fire. Then he wheeled and took flight.

He did not run far. Slater Martin dropped him with a careful shot from his revolver. That Corporal aimed low and hit his man in the thigh.

It was enough to drop the Indian to the snow. He offered no resistance as the three policemen brought him back to the fire.

In the meantime Black Mike had jerked the sled away from the flames and rolled it in the snow. It had caught ablaze but was not destroyed. Most of the supplies packed on it were rescued also.

But one sled was completely ruined and the fire stank with burning fish and meat, precious food gone up in flames.

"Now what?" Black Mike demanded.

Slater was dressing Blue Moon's wound. The bullet had torn straight through the Indian's flesh. Martin bandaged it carefully, then saw that the Cree was securely

TROPICAL NORTHLAND

Northern Canada (which France was willing to give up for some sugar plantations) has the second largest grazing area in the world—1,500,000 to 2,000,000 square miles of prairie land, equal to half the area of the United States. And on Ellesmere Land, the most northerly of the Canadian Islands, there are more than 115 species of flowering plants. In the polar regions in general, according to Markham, there are 332 species of moss, 250 lichens, 28 ferns, and 762 species of flowering plants. Can California equal this record? We doubt it.

bound to the loaded sled, and that to an aspen clump.

Not until then did he attempt to answer Black Mike's question. A reply was not easy. They could not pack all of the supplies plus their sullen prisoner onto one sled. Wounded as he was, painfully if not grievously, Blue Moon could not be expected to walk. Three men and a wounded prisoner could not exist upon the supplies they could carry in their packs.

"We will go on to the forks of the Tuqua," the Corporal declared.

THE three Redcoats fairly staggered under the weight of their burdens. The sled upon which Blue Moon lay, tightly bound despite his wound, was also overloaded. The extra dogs helped pull the heavy dead weight along but at a snail's pace. However, the policemen could hardly keep up. Each man carried a full hundred pounds on his back; they had abandoned precious little of their larder.

Reaching the forks of the Tuqua, they occupied the same camp they had built on the way up. Their structure was near weather-proof as the soaked branches froze solid. Then Black Mike, with the one sled and the stoutest huskies, made ready for his dash to the post.

"Jamie and I can get by until help can come," decided Martin. "Advise the Inspector to send at least two sleds and teams."

Black Mike nodded. But he looked anxiously after his younger brother, who was out after firewood.

"I could take it better up here," he suggested.

"I know it, Mike," agreed the Corporal.

"But it's a hard trip to the post in this weather. Jamie *might* make it; I *know* you can."

The big constable nodded.

"We should be all right," Martin reassured him. "We have food enough for ten days, longer if we stretch it out. A rescue sled can reach us by then. The youngster will probably put on weight up here with me."

Black Mike had to agree. With almost two weeks' provisions, a shelter that was weatherproof until the ice melted, and ample wood there was no reason why the two Redcoats and their prisoner should even be uncomfortable.

The one present shortage in their larder was of frozen fish for the dogs. Black Mike loaded all they had on his sled. He would carry two spare huskies; the others were shot. It sickened the Redcoats to thus destroy valuable dogs but the animals could not be fed any longer from dwindling stores.

Then Black Mike faded out of sight. It had not been necessary for Martin to advise him to follow the Tuquan river bed when the wind had swept the ice clean. The big constable had been in this Northland a long time. On the ice he could ride, and thus save his strength against the long hard days when he must break trail for his hard-pressed team.

Martin, Jamie Prewitt, and their prisoner settled down for the long wait.

"Two weeks," mused Jamie, "will be a long time."

Martin nodded sympathetically. Often it was the loneliness more than the physical hardship which made a chechacko crack up.

"If we had a deck of cards," the Corporal said, "the time would go faster." He took his hunting knife out of its scabbard. "I'll teach you the trick of throwing a knife," he said. "It might come in handy some time. The French-Canucks are expert with it."

For a time Blue Moon watched silently from his pallet as the Corporal instructed the young constable in the art of flipping the weapon. Then suddenly he spoke up.

"My people throw the knife as if it were a dead weight, with only a half-turn."

The tone of his voice, and his interest in their pursuit, surprised Martin.

"It is better so," the Cree explained, defending the ways of his ancestor. "We can throw the knife from any position. The French must throw it overhanded."

He looked down at his rawhide bonds and a faint smile showed on his coppery face.

"With my hands free and a sharp point," he murmured, "I could put on a very good show."

"We will take your word for it," Martin refused good-humoredly.

VII

BLACKMON had not been forewarned of Commissioner James Alexander's plans. The man whose record as Inspector of the Sanokota district had earned him quick promotion and wholehearted respect suddenly arrived at the post with two enlisted men as an escort. Luckily Blackmon had been sober the night before and had donned a fresh uniform that morning. Blackmon was either sloppy or immaculate on alternate days, and conducted his routine duties the same way. The Commissioner arrived to find Blackmon hard at work on his reports.

The district's paper work was in good shape. Pale Flower, intelligent and efficient, had kept it so, though much of her time at the office was spent in repulsing the Inspector's advances.

Alexander approved the changes Blackmon had made in the post's operation. Though himself a product of the school of experience, the Commissioner did not minimize the importance of the training school's program. But Alexander also knew that two qualities which an inspector must possess had to be born in a man and not acquired. Integrity and judgment could not be learned out of a textbook.

Across the river Cole Pullman waited uneasily for the Commissioner to be gone. The Sanokota superintendent invited Alexander to dinner, a routine social gesture as they had never been intimate, but was grateful when the Commissioner declined. Pullman was not anxious for Alexander and Beth Davidson to talk about her father's imprisonment. Pullman was not hurrying the girl, believing that time was playing into his hands. Pullman and the Inspector who had degenerated into his

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puppet were no longer upset over Blue Moon's escape. The Cree's flight had taken Slater Martin away from the post for the time being, for the most precious time, and the menace of one more than counterbalanced the danger of the other. Besides, with the North country gripped in icy winter there was no immediate danger of an insurrection. There would be no aftermaths of Blue Moon's arrest until the thaws set in.

Commissioner Alexander learned of Davidson's detention and Blue Moon's flight, of course. He was shocked. Badger had been his friend and, as an Inspector.

Alexander had found Blue Moon a zealous defender of his people, honest and cooperative. Blue Moon had been the first Cree chieftain to turn law breakers among his people over to the Mounted for trial.

"I find these charges hard to believe, Inspector," Alexander said sternly after reading the files.

"So did I," Blackmon agreed quickly. When out of the fog of liquor and despondency, he was an alert capable man. He had anticipated another question the Commissioner would put and had his answer ready. "That is why," he explained, "I have not sent Badger Davidson into headquarters. Perhaps I am wrong in holding him here so long—but I am making him comfortable, giving him special attention—and I did not want to put the stigma of an official charge upon his record until more evidence is secured."

The Commissioner nodded in approval. Perhaps he had misjudged this man, thought Alexander; perhaps Blackmon did possess the judgment and patience to head a district.

"The evidence is damning, of course," frowned Alexander. "What has Corporal Martin to say about Blue Moon's guilt?"

"I have had no time to discuss it with Corporal Martin," the Inspector lied. "Martin was away on patrol when the arrest was made. I sent him after Blue Moon; sent him immediately."

The Commissioner nodded. "I would suggest," he said carefully, "that you assign Corporal Martin to the investigation as soon as he returns with the prisoner. Martin is one of the most competent men

in the Mounted. No man is more respected by the Crees."

He studied the man who had succeeded him as head of the Sanakota district.

"There was a time," he said mildly, "when we could count upon the Crees to cooperate with us."

Blackmon's face flushed slightly but he was again quick and reassuring with his explanation. "I have worried over that, sir," he answered immediately. "I like to justify my conduct by pointing out that Blue Moon is becoming more and more difficult to handle. But I shan't say that, not officially, sir. I only wish to answer your comment by saying that I am doing my level best to treat the Crees as fairly as you did."

Alexander could not pursue his criticism in the face of such an attitude, but he did not wish to drop the matter.

"This is a grievous incident," he said soberly. "A Cree uprising might well result. Perhaps, Inspector, I should deal directly with Martin and . . ."

"No, sir," Blackmon answered with one of those flashes of character that had once been his personality. "It is my responsibility, Commissioner. I shall meet it. When I make my final report concerning Davidson and Blue Moon, I shall stand behind it. Then I am either due a commendation, a mild reprimand or perhaps trial and dismissal. I shall accept what comes."

Alexander had to agree. The Commissioner left Sanakota with more confidence in the Inspector than when he had come. Blackmon stared after the two dog teams with an unpleasant smile on his lips. He had fooled the Commissioner, he thought. Now headquarters would wait for his final report, and would accept his decision for the time being. Perhaps an investigation would come eventually, but Blackmon did not care. Dismissal from the service would not pain him; he intended to resign anyhow.

But, after the Commissioner had gone, he closeted himself with his whiskey and his bitter thoughts. He did not yet regret his deal with Pullman. Mona would return to him when he had accepted employment with the fur company in a city. That, he reminded himself again, was worth anything.

But he drank deep in hurried gulps. His was a deliberate betrayal of his oath as a Redcoat. Once that had been important. At times it still was.

Cole Pullman was pleased with Blackmon's account of Alexander's inspection.

"I believe it's safe," murmured the superintendent, "to offer to free her father if she will marry me."

"I think so," nodded Blackmon. "I think the Commissioner would have no objection if I buried Davidson's file."

"But," pointed out Pullman, "you can't put Martin in charge of the investigation. That man is a shrewd devil."

Pullman poured a drink for himself and the Inspector. "It would be nice," he mused, "if Martin didn't find Blue Moon for a few months."

"Which is not only possible but probable," Blackmon pointed out hopefully. "Listen to that gale outside. It's still colder up the Tuquan. Evidently Blue Moon reached the tributaries, or we would have heard from Martin a long time ago. I'd bet a month's pay that none of the three have seen hide nor hair of him."

Pullman did not accept the bet. If he had, then Blackmon would have been further in debt to the Sanokota superintendent almost immediately.

For the very next morning, haggard and tired from pushing his dogs at top speed, Black Mike Prewitt arrived at the post with his report that Corporal Martin and his brother were holding Blue Moon prisoner at the Tuquan forks.

BLACKMON managed to conceal his agitation as he listened to the details of Constable Prewitt's report, but only by great effort. It was incredible. Blue Moon had gotten past the Tuquan headwaters and into the trackless wastes, and yet Corporal Martin had speedily located the fugitive, captured him and was holding him prisoner. Though his thoughts were far away, Blackmon's head bobbed again and again as Black Mike described the plight of the Cree's captors.

"Certainly, certainly," he murmured. "We'll send out a sled right away."

Then, recovering his poise, he smiled at the big constable: "But certainly their relief can wait for you to have a night's

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sleep, Constable," he said with assumed heartiness. "Roll in your bunk now and sleep until I send for you."

Black Mike did not require further urging. And immediately a shaken Inspector carried the tidings to a grim man whose face went even darker as he heard Blackmon to the quivering finish.

"Now what?" The Inspector demanded hopelessly.

"It's no worse than before," Pullman said. "We will have to go through with it as we originally planned. We'll send Blue Moon on to headquarters and release Davidson for lack of evidence."

"It won't work," despaired Blackmon. "I've talked to the Commissioner. He doesn't believe Blue Moon is guilty. He'll delay an examining trial until Martin has made an investigation. And there are some things about this post I don't want headquarters to know. Not right now, anyhow."

Pullman nodded. He didn't have to be told what those things were.

The Sanokota superintendent paced up and down his office. Suddenly he whirled on Blackmon, eyes gleaming.

"How much is it worth to you to silence Martin and Blue Moon?" he demanded.

"Everything," was the prompt answer.

"We need only a little time," Pullman said grimly. "We can get it."

"How?"

"By leaving Martin and Blue Moon to their fate!"

Blackmon's face paled. "No," he whispered huskily. "No man deserves a fate like that. Besides, it couldn't be done. How about Constable Prewitt?"

"Take him with you," snapped Pullman. "The two of you go. And Prewitt doesn't come back either."

"You mean . . .!" gasped the Inspector. "No, Pullman, I couldn't do that."

"It would be easy," the Sanokota superintendent said coldly "A bullet in his brain as he slept. You can make up a good story. You reached the Tuquan tributaries and you didn't find Martin. You and Constable Prewitt split up to search for them. You never saw Prewitt again."

"No," Blackmon repeated.

"It's the only thing, man," Pullman said impatiently. "You're already in this deep enough to ruin you. Your report would be

accepted by headquarters. It could never be proven false."

"But Martin and Blue Moon and Prewitt are at the forks," protested the Inspector. "They're holed up there. They'll leave signs. In the Spring, when a searching party . . ."

"They won't stay there," declared Pullman. "When they run low on provisions, and relief is overdue, they'll start downriver. Put yourself in their place. Would you just squat there and starve?"

"No," Blackmon conceded. He dropped his eyes before the superintendent's glare. "It's too dastardly a thing, Cole," he said weakly. "I can't do it."

"Are you willing to throw away everything you have?" demanded Cole. "See me through this, Blackmon, and I'll make you purchasing agent of the company. I swear it. I'll start you at ten thousand dollars a year with a year's pay in advance."

Blackmon was tempted. Personal debts harrassed him. His police pay had never provided for the luxuries Mona demanded.

"With that," Pullman pointed out, "you can win Mona back. She would never be able to resist such an income and such a position."

The Inspector did not notice the sneer in the fur man's voice. All he could think about was the possibility of having Mona again.

"You can resign in the spring," continued Pullman. "By then you would have your job for me and I could pay you well. They could never find your tracks, Blackmon."

The Inspector sighed. "I wish there were some way," he demurred, "for getting rid of Black Mike without . . ."

Pullman scowled. So that was what worried the weakling. He did not mind abandoning Slater Martin, Jamie Prewitt and Blue Moon to a death from exposure or starvation nearly as much as he did the prospect of doing physical violence himself.

"You'll have to decide that yourself, Blackmon," Pullman said coldly. "It's your neck that's in the noose. It's your wife who's at stake."

Blackmon nodded. The Inspector had already assented, to himself. The two crimes ahead were more deplorable than the ones behind. That was usually the case,

the Inspector reflected. He returned to his quarters and sought comfort in a bottle.

"Come spring," he promised his inner self, "and I'll clear out. I'll put all of this behind me."

Then he comforted also with the picture of blonde Mona.

VIII

BETH DAVIDSON was not unconscious of Cole Pullman's growing impatience. Still the Sanokota superintendent did not make a direct proposal; he could not bring himself to do that until he had been assured that she would accept.

But Pullman's concern for her father's welfare, and his repeated anxiety that the winter's confinement would endanger Badger Davidson's help, reminded her daily that Pullman sought her as a wife as well as a woman. The latter interest had not been pronounced until she had accepted the Sanokota's hospitality and he had been in daily contact with her. Pullman had thought her physically attractive, but until these recent weeks his had been only an impersonal desire; she was a pretty woman, and it would require a comely one to arouse his interests.

She had done that. More and more Pullman became conscious of the swell of her bosoms, of the curves of her young body. Returning from his almost daily visit to her father, he feasted his eyes upon her. She flushed slightly. She did not relish such flagrant admiration.

"Badger is fine," he announced. "I believe he has gained ten pounds this winter."

She nodded happily. Her father had accepted confinement better than she had ever imagined he would. He had not been treated as an ordinary prisoner, for which Cole Pullman took credit. Badger Davidson could walk around the post during daylight hours and had even been permitted to employ his woodland skill on a river boat which he had always dreamed of building. Pullman had cheerfully provided him the materials. The guardhouse had been comfortably furnished, even to furs and a sheet-iron stove over which

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Badger could cook his own meals if he wished. These items were not Mounted issue but from the Sanokota's warehouse.

"You have been very kind to him," agreed Beth. "We're very grateful."

"I had a reason, Beth," Cole Pullman reminded her. For days he had been waiting an opportunity to propose to her, if she would only first encourage him with her indication that she would accept.

She raised her eyes, dropped them again.

"I know," she murmured.

"I want to free your father," Pullman declared. "I don't want him to even stand trial. I'm hoping—I'm attempting—to influence Inspector Blackmon to drop the charges."

He had not intended to say it thus. He regretted his words the moment he had uttered them. He had intended for her to petition that, that he use his influence with Blackmon, and for him to promise to do so in return for her promise to marry him. But he was a little swept away by the charm of this girl. He had committed himself more than he had intended.

Beth nodded. "I don't doubt," she said slowly, "that Inspector Blackmon will do it if you ask him."

Again she had not promised what he sought. His eyes studied her. Damn her for being a provocative little wench, he thought. Then he smiled. He would enjoy her more this way.

"If I should, Beth," he asked softly, "would you marry me?"

She turned her blue eyes directly upon him. "Are you asking me?"

"Yes," he admitted after a moment.

She looked away again. This was no surprise to her; she had anticipated it for weeks. She even already knew what answer she would give. There was only one answer she could make. But she lowered her head and did not give it. Something within her held that answer back.

"I'll tell you soon, Cole," she murmured.

"How soon?" he demanded. Her confusion made him bolder. "Tomorrow? The next day?"

"Perhaps," she parried.

Cole nodded, content with that. "I would like a spring wedding," he said. "As soon as the furs are in. Then I could take you on a real honeymoon. Montreal. Quebec. San Francisco."

He was carried away with his own enthusiasm. "I'll show you the luxuries of fine hotels and cabarets," he went on. "You'll wear diamonds and rich velvets."

She smiled slightly. At the moment she was not thinking about luxuries. She was thinking about Slater Martin, and wondering if their supplies had lasted until Inspector Blackmon and Constable Prewitt reached the Tuquan forks.

Cole Pullman left her, seemingly convinced that her affirmative answer was certain. The Sanokota superintendent hummed to himself as he sought his quarters.

Beth was not as happy. She sat up for an hour or more after Cole left. What he proposed answered every question in her heart but one—Slater Martin.

A week later that last doubt was removed. For Louis Blackmon returned from his two-week trip into the Sanokota with a doleful report.

He had found the camp where Blue Moon, Corporal Martin and Constable Prewitt were supposed to be waiting, but had discovered no sign of them. The poor men must have gambled desperately upon reaching some trapper's cabin and had been lost. Also Black Mike had been swallowed up in the wastes. The Constable had left the Inspector in a vain effort to locate his brother. The mystery of the North had engulfed all four men.

Blackmon led out another searching party but these returned empty-handed also. The camp at the forks of the Tuquan was deserted as the Inspector had reported.

Now, after a month, there was no point in holding out hope for the three members of the Royal Mounted and their Cree prisoner.

And Beth had no reason for further delaying the announcement of her engagement to Cole Pullman.

FOR a week the three ice-bound men stood the strain well enough, even Constable Jamie Prewitt. Then time weighed heavily on their hands and the uncertainty of their plight began to harass them. Both scarlet-coated men tried to replenish their dwindling larder with fresh game but no beasts roamed the wastes in this winter fury. The river provided only

a few fish; the holes in the ice froze as fast as they were chopped.

Martin had expected Black Mike to return with a relief party in ten days. On the morning of the tenth day they had only a small portion of flour, a half-dozen slices of bacon and a half-can of beans in their larder. This was consumed in one meal.

Slater and Jamie waited expectantly, nerves jumpy, through that day and the next. At the end of the twelfth day the Corporal was able to reassure the younger policeman that any number of things might have happened to delay his brother's return—a heavy snow downstream, an accident, a miscalculation in the time. Blue Moon listened to their talk with stoic indifference. Now the Indian could use his wounded limb. He had exercised it under Slater's careful guard, walking slowly back and forth in front of their camp.

In the night Jamie Prewitt argued heatedly that they should start downstream in the morning. Their fare for that day had been a small helping of baked fish, fish without benefit of seasoning or bread. Both men were out of tobacco and had only a few cartridges left for their rifles. They had taken too many wild shots at northland birds in the hope of accidentally dropping one of the gaunt fowls

"Hell, Martin," stormed Jamie, for the moment forgetting his official poise, "there is no use of sitting here and starving. If they are coming at all we'll be moving to meet them. And I'd feel a sight better."

Martin nodded. So would he.

"All right," he yielded, "we'll start out in the morning."

With axes and rawhide thongs they made a crude sled for Blue Moon after the Indian coldly refused to fashion himself crude snowshoes and match them pace for pace. The Redcoats had to take turns at pulling the sled along.

By noon they had covered only a few miles of the winding riverbed. Jamie expressed disappointment at their slow progress but Martin was not surprised. Slater did not doubt for a moment that theirs was a death march. He could not understand what had happened to delay Black Mike's return but he understood fully the perils of the step they had taken. Again

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and again he doubted his judgment in yielding to the Constable's arguments. But, he reassured himself, Black Mike would have already been back unless something had happened to the big constable. Anything might have happened—a runaway team, a wolf pack, an ambush by a disgruntled Indian or an outlaw trapper.

They camped early, building a temporary shelter against the cold. There would always be firewood as long as they followed the river course and the prospect of catching fish. But the best efforts of Martin and Cameron produced a scaly perch less than a foot long, only a good bite each for three near-famished men.

All were asleep early. Each man was growing weaker physically, even Blue Moon, and their hours of sleep extended past the first hint of sunrise. Then they were moving slowly downstream again. Martin now pulled the crude sled two miles to Cameron's one. Jamie was weakening rapidly, the Corporal observed. In camp that night the Constable talked little, rolling in his furs almost as soon as the fire had flared up.

Martin was conscious of his own inner hollowness as he warmed before the blaze. The cold was penetrating his furs and beneath his parka; it seemed that he could not warm himself.

Blue Moon spoke for the first time since refusing to walk on improvised snowshoes.

"It is no use, my brother," the Indian murmured. "They have abandoned you. The first post is many days ahead. My brother and the young redcoat will go only another day. Perhaps two. It does not matter."

Martin glared at him. "If you'd walk and help us," he growled, "we might make it."

Blue Moon struggled up to a sitting position. "I live free of the white man's injustice or I do not live at all," the Cree shrugged. "I will help my brother and the young constable for my freedom."

"No," Slater snapped. "We'll go on. We'll meet someone tomorrow. Or the next day at least. The Mounted won't let us die up here. Somebody will come after us."

But the Corporal's voice sounded hollow even to himself. James Alexander would

have had a patrol out searching for them but he doubted if this had occurred to Inspector Blackmon. Wouldn't Blackmon wait indifferently at the post until spring before becoming concerned over their fate? Such a thought was no comfort.

It was mid-morning before they were lurching onward. The glare of the white frozen expanse was now squarely in their faces. By nightfall Jamie Cameron had been reduced to a helpless quivering wreck of a man. Slater Martin himself was near dead with fatigue. He could no longer pull the heavy sled behind him and he knew it.

But he withheld action until the next day, holding out the last hope that daylight would bring the comforting shout of fellow Redcoats.

But there was no sound. Martin bent over Blue Moon and slashed the Cree's rawhide bonds.

"All right, Blue Moon," he said gruffly. "Make it if you can."

"My brother is giving me my freedom?" the Indian asked.

"I am making no deal with you," croaked Martin. "I cannot let a prisoner die in his bonds. That is all."

Blue Moon nodded and stood up slowly, stretching his aching limbs. He had conserved carefully with the instincts of his kind. He had not worn himself out pulling a bulky sled laden with a man's weight. His dark eyes gleamed triumphantly. He was not afraid of the ordeal ahead.

Slater and Jamie Cameron lurched downstream without further regard for their late prisoner. First the Cree busied himself fashioning crude snowshoes and a hand sled. The latter was a secret of his own, for coasting down the slopes where the snow was smooth. It was little heavier than a pack for the generous supply of fur robes Corporal Martin had thrown at his feet.

Then, equipped to travel, the Cree thought of his empty stomach. He chose a shallow inlet along the river, then labored to fell a dead tree which stood guard over a sandy point like a ghostly sentinel. The tree dropped with a splash, crushing through the icy surface of the shallow water, and creating a shallow dam which cut off the inlet from the main stream.

Then, pulling up branches, Blue Moon

tossed them over the ice and set them afire. Soon there were hissing sounds, and finally the blazing bushes sunk into open water and were extinguished.

Meanwhile Blue Moon had been fashioning a net out of one of the fur robes. Stripping off his moccasins and leggings, he stepped into the water, pulling his net after him. Stepping out on the bank, his first thought were for his exposed feet and legs. He rubbed them carefully with snow, then warmed them and re-donned his leggings. Then he examined his catch.

Squirming in his crude net were a dozen fish, mostly small perch and bass fingerlings. The Cree roasted them slightly over his fire and then, his appetite partially appeased, rolled his furs onto his small hand sled. He hesitated a moment as he surveyed the white wastes around him. He peered downstream. The two white men had disappeared. A smile touched the Indian's face. They and their crude fishing, chopping holes in the ice and dropping in a line! They and their faith in a rescue party! He shrugged his shoulders. Their fate was no affair of his. He turned toward the north wind.

IX

THERE WAS no evidence of grief in Pale Flower's eyes when she heard from Louis Blackmon's own lips that Blue Moon, Corporal Martin and the two Prewitts had been abandoned as lost. She did not suspect the Inspector of having murdered one man with his own hands and abandoning the others. Only one thing the Indian girl accused Blackmon of in her heart, and that was of putting forth only a casual effort to relieve the party, and of being almost indifferent to his failure.

That was enough. It was because of this Inspector that her brother had been arrested and had escaped; because of Blackmon Corporal Martin had been forced to pursue a wily prisoner into the wastes of the upper Tuquan.

The Indian girl had observed for herself how Blackmon obeyed the orders of Cole Pullman. Upon the two of them she vented the cold hatred of an Indian. For the moment Pullman was beyond her

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reach, though she was sure that if she was patient, the time would come when she could harm the Sanokota superintendent also.

As far as Inspector Blackmon was concerned, Pale Flower had both the means and the opportunity. She had not yet yielded to his advances. Flushed with the prospects of leaving the Mounted and regaining Mona, Blackmon had not been as persistent in recent weeks. He was even drinking less.

But Pale Flower could quickly reawaken the interest of a love-starved man. Soon Blackmon was pleading with her again.

She led him on, then withheld him. Coyly she reminded him that white men usually brought presents for Indian girls.

He could afford to be generous. By the end of the Spring fur season Pullman would pay him ten thousand dollars a year with a year's pay in advance.

What presents did she want? Pale Flower tossed her dark head. Pretty dresses, of course. And ear-rings and gaudy jewelry.

Blackmon chuckled to himself. He had not thought her so much Indian. The baubles the Sanokota Fur Company carried in stock were cheap trifles, glossy but trivial.

He bought jewelry for her and a dress. The next step was for him to agree that Pale Flower could purchase cloth and jewelry at the post and charge it to his account.

Now she yielded to him, whenever she must.

He believed that he had conquered her, and this thought pleased his vanity. He did not know that Pale Flower was carefully keeping all of the sales slips which showed that she had bought personal items at the post and that they had been charged to Inspector Louis Blackmon.

When the ice broke, she mused, she would go to headquarters. She would cast herself upon the mercy of the Royal Mounted as a young ignorant Indian maiden deceived by one of the Scarlet Coats, and bearing a child by him.

Inspector Blackmon, she told herself with a mirthless smile, would have a hard time clearing his record of that stain.

BLUE MOON did not keep his face to the north wind for long. He kept thinking of the white men staggering forward to their certain doom. One of the redcoats had been his boyhood friend, his brother. The other the Cree held in slight disdain; Jamie Prewitt had not yet won the respect and friendship of the seasoned Northland men. He was a likely chechacko; that was all they could say for him.

But Corporal Martin, the Scarlet-jacketed man known and liked by all Indians! Blue Moon brooded as he ate a handful of fish before a noon-day fire. Perhaps, if he did not have a chechacko on his hands, Martin could reach the post alive. Certainly had not Slater expended his strength hauling a rebellious Indian this far downstream he would have been prepared for the ordeal ahead. The Cree reached a sudden decision.

He turned southward and, sliding along the slopes on his ingenious sled, overtook the white men in mid-afternoon. Struck by snow blindness, Jamie was being helped along by the tiring Corporal. Martin himself was near collapse. The Corporal offered no protest when Blue Moon removed his revolver and rifle. As carefully disarming Constable Prewitt, the Indian lowered both men to fur pallets behind an ice-coated aspen patch and then sought another inlet and repeated his performance with his improvised net.

With the last cartridges in Martin's rifle—Jamie's gun was empty—the Indian dropped a grell. Bird and fish were made into a lumpy tasteless stew which the Cree forced between Jamie's lips. A few bites of food and Martin was able to feed himself. The blood of the gaunt fowl had been carefully brewed into the soup. It was all a man could do to keep from spitting out the broth in distaste, but it was sustaining.

In the morning Slater could slush along on his snowshoes at a slow pace. The temporary-blinded Jamie Prewitt was bound onto Blue Moon's re-fashioned sled as if the constable, and not the Indian, was the fugitive. At mid-day they rested and Martin was able to assist the Cree in dredging his log-dammed cove. Two sets of hands were better than one; they hauled a longer net through the melted ice and

drug out enough fish to eat their fill for the first time in days.

They stopped again after an hour's tramp and repeated the meal.

"Fish no stick to a man's ribs," grunted Blue Moon. "Man live on fish alone, he must eat often."

A fresh blizzard halted their progress. Blue Moon studies the dark sky, then announced that he would leave them and go for help. Some of his people were trapping only a two-day march away, he explained.

Slater Martin offered no protest. There was no choice but to depend upon this red man's return. He could stagger on a day or so longer, for he had been considerably revived. But he could not pull a load; Prewitt was near utter exhaustion.

He could not help reflecting bitterly upon this unnatural turn of events. A white man, one of their fellow Redcoats, had gone for relief and had not returned. Would the Cree retrace his steps? Why should Blue Moon, now so near to his own people, venture back into the fury of winter to rescue two Royal Mounted patrolmen whose first gesture after their recovery would be another pursuit of their rescuer?

Yet, as he carefully changed the bandages on Jamie's eyes, Martin knew that Blue Moon would not fail them.

He didn't. Four days later the white men heard the yapping of dogs. Through the snow came two teams of huskies and four Cree trappers. The near-famished men, both now more dead than alive, were carefully borne into a Cree camp and there nursed back to strength by attentive squaws. Caribou meat was a wholesome diet after their unsavory fish and bird stews. Within a week Slater Martin was completely recovered. Prewitt's eyes healed more slowly and for a time the Corporal feared the young constable would never see again. Then the burning stopped and vision slowly returned.

There was no evidence of Blue Moon. The Cree chieftains volunteered no information and Slater did not ask questions.

But he found himself hoping again and again that Blue Moon had made good his threat to escape into the north country, beyond the Tuquan, beyond Lake Sitski,

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beyond the reach of the white man's law.

He was a little shocked when the Cree returned.

"I go back with you," Blue Moon announced with simple dignity.

Martin held out his hand. "I'll see you through this," he promised hoarsely. "I'll appeal to headquarters."

The Cree, however, refused to leave for the post at once.

"Before we nearly die," he shrugged. "We stay here until ice breaks."

OTHERS were waiting impatiently for the ice to break. The preparations had been completed for Cole Pullman's wedding; now the Sanokota superintendent was eager for the trappers to come downstream with their winter's catch and for the honeymoon to begin. Pale Flower inspected the frozen river bed almost daily. The ice layers would break downstream before the first crush from upriver swept the heavier floes down the Tuquan. Not for days had she permitted Blackmon to touch her. She had achieved her purpose; further relations with him were impossible.

She slipped away in a borrowed canoe as soon as slivers of open water showed up in the expanse of ice. At headquarters she told her story to gimlet-eyed James Alexander.

The Commissioner questioned her further about the pursuit of Blue Moon. He heard her story, then ordered the fastest dog team on the post and, with the Indian girl as a passenger and witness, whipped the huskies into a dead run.

The ice was cracking up when the Commissioner reached Sanokota. He swept in upon the post at an early morning hour, before Blackmon had reported for duty, and confronted the Inspector with his accusation.

For a moment Blackmon was stunned. Then he swiftly recovered his poise.

"You caught me utterly by surprise, Commissioner," he explained with a hollow laugh. "An innocent man would naturally be startled by such a ridiculous charge. This Indian girl has been employed in my office, yes. But I have had no relations with her beyond the course of duty."

Alexander studied the Inspector. Black-

mon could muster a convincing attitude when he chose.

In his pocket the Commissioner had the sales slips from the Sanokota post.

"Come with me," Alexander said grimly.

Blackmon followed without protest, still unaware of the evidence that Alexander had against him.

The Commissioner ordered a boat and they crossed the river. Alexander was quickly ushered into Pullman's office.

The Sanokota superintendent sensed quickly that Blackmon was in trouble. He greeted the Commissioner politely, but warily.

Tersely Alexander explained the charges against Blackmon.

"Pale Flower has these to substantiate her story," the Commissioner said grimly, displaying the sales slips. "Will you not verify them, Mr. Pullman? These slips were issued by your post and the merchandise received by the Indian girl was charged to Inspector Blackmon's account."

Pullman studied the slips, thinking swiftly.

He turned upon Blackmon.

"Louis, I told you that you would get in trouble with this," he said with an apologetic smile. He turned to the Commissioner.

"This girl asked for credit," he explained. "We did not grant it until Mr. Blackmon agreed to stand good for all of the Indian employees at the post. The Inspector said that since they would not receive their pay until this Spring, he felt it a duty to vouch for their honesty. I had not realized the young woman was buying so extravagantly or I would have warned Louis."

Pullman presented a calm smiling exterior. "I have never seen it to fail, Commissioner," he shrugged. "Whenever a white man stands good for an Indian, they run up an extravagant bill. I have no knowledge of the Inspector's relations with the woman, Commissioner, but if this is evidence that he has had carnal association, then he is guilty of such conduct with every Indian employed at the post. For he vouched for the accounts of all of them and every credit entry is made in our books in exactly this fashion."

The Commissioner studied the faces of

both men. Neither shrank beneath his penetrating gaze.

"I will look into this further," Alexander stated. "If you have been accused false, Inspector, it will be clearly entered so upon your record."

Beth Davidson burst into the office, her cheeks livid with color. Her wedding gown and trossseau had just arrived from Catawba, and she had come to thank Pullman for the expensive presents. The superintendent had insisted that the usual formalities be dispensed with and he be allowed to purchase his bride's trossseau.

She stopped short at seeing the Commissioner, and the words of gratitude died on her lips. The sight of James Alexander reminded her of another member of the Royal Mounted. It had been Alexander who had introduced Corporal Slater Martin to her.

"Why, Inspector!" she exclaimed. Then, with a little laugh: "I mean, Commissioner, of course. I am glad to see you."

"Miss Davidson," Pullman announced proudly, "has done me the honor of accepting me as a husband, Commissioner. If you can prolong your visit, we would appreciate your attendance at our wedding."

James Alexander looked from Pullman to Beth. Her eyes dropped under his gaze.

"My congratulations," the Commissioner said slowly.

He walked out of the post without another word.

Blackmon followed behind, barely able to keep his triumph suppressed. This, Louis thought, will be the last jam we have to wriggle out of. Already the bigger ice floes had floated on down the Tugan. The trappers would be bringing in their pelts soon and shuck this scarlet jacket and go in search of Mona.

Commissioner James Alexander still had sharp vision. He raised up as the motor launch bore them across the stream and pointed far up the river.

"The first boats!" he exclaimed. "I can see them."

Blackmon nodded. There were faint specks in the distance.

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a time of excitement and celebration at the trading post.

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X

LOUIS BLACKMON sent for Pale Flower as soon as he returned to his office. She stood before him, impassively sullen, defiant.

"You rotten Indian wench," the Inspector said hoarsely. "So you thought you'd ruin me!"

The Commissioner was no further away than the next office but Blackmon caught the girl's arm and twisted it cruelly. The Inspector knew that she would not cry out.

He whirled her around and kicked her. "Now get out," he grated. "If I find you hanging around here after the Commissioner leaves I'll make things worse for you than they are now."

Pale Moon obeyed. She packed her possessions in the same worn valise she had taken with her to the white man's school at Catawba and lugged it herself to the wharf. There she waited, chill, lonely, unhappy, for the first boat from Catawba to finish unpacking supplies and mail. She would take passage to Catawba, she thought, but she would not stop there. And she could never return to the Sanokota country again. The vengeance of the Crees upon her would be swift and deadly. She, a daughter of a chieftain, had disgraced the tribe!

Dusk now had dropped over the river. A handful of trappers had already tethered their canoes and were at the trading post glorying in the whiskey and hot food. Two Crees pulled up on the post side and unloaded their bales. Pale Flower watched them through tearful eyes. They did not notice her and she did not speak to them, though they were of her brother's tribe.

Then one of them suddenly let out a cry and pointed upstream, toward a canoe bearing swiftly down upon the wharf. Pale Flower thrilled to that cry. With such a shout had the Crees greeted her father, and then Blue Moon after Stout Arm had passed on to the happy hunting grounds.

The canoe came nearer, put in to shore. Pale Flower stared a moment. Then, with

a cry, she ran down to the water's edge.

There was no mistaking the identity of the Indian standing straight and proud in the canoe's bow. Blue Moon!

Slater Martin occupied the stern seat.

Blue Moon leaped ashore and stared at his sister a moment. Then he put his arm around her shoulders in the way of the white people and hugged her tightly.

She slipped from his embrace to greet Corporal Martin.

"They said you were dead," she whispered. "They said you would never come back."

He laughed and also hugged her.

Then he took Blue Moon's arm. "Let's report to the Inspector," he said gruffly.

The Cree nodded. "If you want to put handcuffs on me, then . . ." he offered.

Martin shook his head. "You've come this far of your own free will," he said. "We can walk in together."

Walk in they did, walk in upon Louis Blackmon who was lulling his throbbing nerves with whiskey.

The Inspector's face went white.

"Martin!" he gasped. He closed his eyes, wondering if this could be a nightmare. But when he opened them again there was not only Martin standing there but also Constable Jamie Prewitt and Blue Moon.

"No!" screamed the Inspector. "No!"

Martin stared. He had never seen a man so upset before.

"You are not flesh and blood," moaned the Inspector. "You're ghosts come back to haunt me. Get out of here, I tell you."

The Corporal stepped forward and caught the frantic man's arm just as Blackmon was ready to throw an ink well.

"Snap out of it, man," Slater said crisply. "Our prisoner returned of his own free will."

"Don't touch me!" gasped Blackmon, breaking away. Then the Inspector fell back into his chair with a sigh. Martin's grip had done it. The clutch of Martin's hand had convinced him that this was no moment of delirium.

"It's you," he said faintly. "You did get back."

"Of course."

"All right," Blackmon went in a monotone. "I'll confess everything."

"Confess!"

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Still this didn't make sense to Slater Martin. Louis Blackmon came faltering to his feet.

"Give me a moment or two, Corporal," he begged. "Wait outside there . . . 'til I send for you."

Martin obeyed with a shrug of his shoulders. He and Blue Moon and Constable Prewitt stood outside the Inspector's door.

They kept waiting. Still no summons came, though long minutes had passed. Then an explosion rocked the office of the Mounted. Martin looked askantly at Jamie, then pulled at the Inspector's door. When it opened, he ran inside.

Blackmon lay sprawled over his desk. A gun whose nozzle was still smoking lay before him.

The Inspector was dead.

CLUTCHED in one hand was a sheet of paper upon which Blackmon had written with ink and a quill pen. Martin noticed that it was addressed to Commissioner James Alexander.

"What goes on here?" A voice from the door demanded.

Slater turned and his eyes gleamed as James Alexander stalked into the office.

"Commissioner!" exclaimed the Corporal, holding out his hand.

"Slater Martin! Man, I thought you were lost."

"I was," nodded the Corporal. "But Blue Moon . . ."

His voice fell off. The Commissioner had turned upon Blackmon's desk and was staring in horror at the awful sight which met his eyes.

"He wrote this," Martin said, handing Alexander the paper on which Blackmon had written. "It's for you."

Alexander went through the formality of examining Blackmon's pulse. Then he glanced over the document. Quickly he realized what it was. He looked up at Martin.

"Did you read it?" he demanded.

"No, sir," said the Corporal. "You came in just then and . . ."

"No matter," the Commissioner said brusquely. "You may read it in full later. I suggest now that you send for Corporal Snodgrass to handle . . . this."

And he indicated the corpse with a motion of his hand.

"Yes, sir," agreed Martin. He hesitated. "And Blue Moon, sir? I was going to ask the Commissioner to accept his parole. He could have escaped a dozen times if he had been so willing. He came back of his own accord and so . . ."

"Blue Moon is free," Alexander said slowly. "Please accept our apologies, my brother of the Crees."

Both Martin and the Cree stared.

The Commissioner indicated the message Blackmon had left.

"Here is the entire ugly story," sighed Alexander. "Blackmon killed himself rather than face it, and I don't blame him. His confession will put a rope around Cole Pullman's neck."

"I'll have to be here several days longer," he announced. "Corporal Martin, you will assume the duties of Inspector until an appointment has been made by headquarters."

"Yes, sir," the tall man agreed.

A smile curved Alexander's lips. "I think I can promise who it will be," he murmured. "They passed over my recommendation before. They won't again."

"Me, sir?" gulped Martin.

"Yes." The Commissioner caught Martin by the shoulder. "Provided, that is," he added, "you raise the courage to propose to Beth Davidson. You came back just in time, Martin. She had convinced herself that she had to marry Pullman to free her father. You can release Badger yourself if you like . . . right now."

"Yes, sir. And thank you, sir."

Alexander turned to Blue Moon and held out his hand. "My people have wronged you, my brother," stated the Commissioner sadly. "Can you find it in your heart to forgive us and accept us as brothers again?"

The pressure of Blue Moon's hand convinced Alexander that the Indian would bear no grudges.

"And your sister, Pale Flower," continued the Commissioner, remembering Blackmon's confession. "I ask it, Blue Moon. You must carry her back with you to your lodges. It is time she returned to her people."

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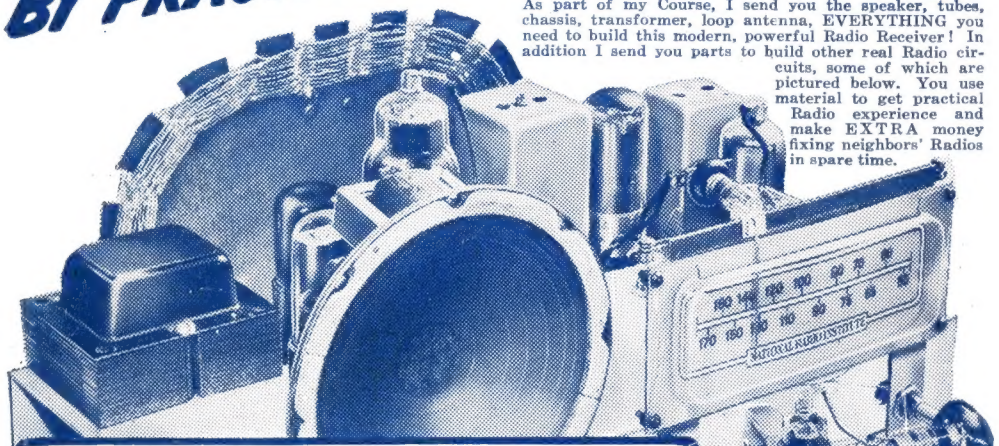
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